

**CURATING DESIGN:  
CONTEXT, CULTURE AND REFLECTIVE  
PRACTICE, 1980 - 2018**

**[Part One of Two]**

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requirements of Kingston University for the degree  
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The Portfolio of Work forms a written, visual and oral record of the research-informed practice undertaken for the case study exhibition discussed in Chapter 4. The research material is presented as a series of PDF documents on a CD included alongside the thesis. Insert the CD and click on each icon which will open the following documents P1 - P10.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Curating Design:**

### **Context, Culture and Reflective Practice, 1980 - 2018**

Curating design has become a fast-emerging and dynamic field of curatorial practice. This practice-informed PhD, which includes a thesis and a portfolio of work, seeks to understand and represent the practice of curating design.

The thesis responds to developments in the field over the last four decades - the development of design-focused museums globally, an expanding design industry, the growing popularity of design exhibitions and new programmes to train curators, including design curators. These developments have been interpreted as part of a broader cultural shift or “curatorial turn.” However, their impact on the practice of curating design remains largely unexplored, despite being a growth area over the last twenty years. There is no comprehensive account of the history and development of the practice of curating design.

The study derives from a substantial body of work extending over twenty-five years. Adopting the researcher’s methodology of “reflective practitioner”, the research provides a perspective on the more recent developments in design curating as practice and discourse within the context and culture of the Design Museum, London. It turns a critical eye on the processes, theories and methods of curating design through a focus on a single exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, curated for the Design Museum in 2013.

This PhD submission comprises two parts; The Thesis (**Part One**) and a Portfolio of Work (**Part Two**). Part One comprises four chapters and serves to firmly locate the subject in its historical and cultural context, aiming to contribute to knowledge and understanding of the practice. The research presented in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 introduces and surveys rapid

developments in the field of curatorial practice. Chapters 3 and 4 locate, introduce and discuss my individual research practice as a design curator.

**Part Two** comprises a Portfolio of Work that forms a written, visual and oral record of the research-informed practice undertaken for the case study exhibition. The research material is presented on a CD included alongside the thesis.

The intended outcome of this practice-informed research is to provide an enhanced understanding of curating design and its place in the museum. In so doing, it aims to contribute meaningfully to a growing historiography of design curation and to an understanding of the expanding role of the design curator.

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## INTRODUCTION

**“The curator is having an identity crisis. Curating is now an industry, constructing its own histories as it evolves. At the same time, it is an increasingly multifaceted practice that gives rise to much speculation as to how it functions and what it entails.”**

Kate Fowle (2007)<sup>1</sup>

Curating design has become a fast-emerging and dynamic field of curatorial practice. International art curator, Kate Fowle focuses attention on the nature of curating in a contemporary context. Writing in 2007 in an essay, *Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator*, Fowle argues that the role of the curator has come a long way from its traditional definition as a “guardian”, “overseer” or “carer” of collections.<sup>2</sup> She reflects on how curating has expanded beyond its traditional parameters to become a diverse practice, located within the institution and outside of it. She urges that such a rapid development has brought about a need to understand the field. Fowle’s call to action influenced the rationale for this practice-informed PhD which examines a largely unexplored area of contemporary curatorial practice; curating design.

This thesis responds to developments in the field over the last four decades and a number of key shifts - the development of design-focused museums globally, an expanded design industry, the growing popularity of design exhibitions and new postgraduate programmes to train curators,

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Fowle, ‘Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today’ in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, apexart 2007: 26.

<sup>2</sup> Harald Szeemann, ‘Does Art Need Directors?’ in Carin Kuoni (ed.), *Words of Wisdom: A Curator’s Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art*, New York: Independent Curator’s International, 2001: 167. Szeemann explores the root of the word *curare*, meaning “to take care of.” While the word stems from the Latin, in English it evolved to mean “guardian” or “overseer.” From 1362 “curator” was used to signify people who cared for (or were in charge of) minors or lunatics, and in 1661 it began to denote “one in charge of a museum, library, zoo or other place of exhibit.” In each case a curator is someone who presides *over* something, suggesting an inherent relationship between care and control.

including design curators. These developments have been interpreted as part of a broader cultural shift or “curatorial turn”.<sup>3</sup> In addition, rising museum attendances, the popularity of the ‘blockbuster’ exhibition, increased media coverage and the establishment of new curatorial platforms, such as the international biennial, have translated into a growing interest in the role of the curator and curating practice.<sup>4</sup> These broader shifts have inevitably impacted on the discipline of curating design. However, the historical, theoretical and cultural discussions informing this development have remained largely unexplored by academics and practitioners working in the field. As yet, there is no comprehensive account of the history and development of the practice of curating design.

Curating contemporary design can be connected to a longer history of collecting and the collecting practices of individuals during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many of these collections were eventually incorporated into those of museums like the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London or the MAK in Vienna. As design historian Catherine McDermott has noted, in these contexts the curator’s function was understood to be in the service of a collection. The decorative arts curator brought to a public or private collection a recognised skill set around specialist subject expertise in, for example, furniture, glass or ceramics. The curator cared for, researched and acquired historical and contemporary objects but there was an element of the job that was steadily growing in importance and that was the production of exhibitions.<sup>5</sup>

Over the last four decades, London has emerged as a centre for

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<sup>3</sup> The term was first proposed by critic Paul O’Neill in an essay, ‘The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse’ in Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007: 13 - 28.

<sup>4</sup> Paul O’Neill provides an analysis of the rise of Biennial culture in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2012: 51-85.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine McDermott, ‘Curating Contemporary Design - 20 Years of Change’, *The Design Journal*, Volume 20, Issue 3, 2017: 307 - 312.

temporary design exhibitions and permanent design displays in museums and galleries but also in commercial spaces. There are more curated exhibitions and events than ever before. Increasingly museums and venues that have traditionally presented exhibitions focusing on fine art or the decorative arts have started to realise the potential of the design exhibition to reach a wider audience. Since the early 2000s, London venues such as the Barbican, Somerset House and the V&A have staged contemporary design exhibitions that have attracted substantial audiences and media coverage. As an example, in 2015 the V&A presented *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (14 March - 2 August 2015). The exhibition was first staged at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2011. Curated by former V&A curator, Andrew Bolton, the exhibition attracted over 650,000 visitors in three months, a record for a fashion exhibition at the museum. In 2015 *Savage Beauty* opened at the V&A, London. Curated by Claire Wilcox, the exhibition was the first retrospective of McQueen's work in Europe and the largest showcase of his work to date.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> Will Coldwell, 'London visitor numbers hit record levels', *The Guardian*, 20 May 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2016/may/20/london-record-visitor-numbers-2015-31-5-million> (Accessed 13.09.16).

**Fig. 1:** Entrance to *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* at the V&A, London, 14 March - 2 August 2015. Curated by Claire Wilcox, Exhibition design: Sam Gainsbury.

In the same year the Barbican hosted *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* (21 October 2015 - 14 February 2016), an exhibition that explored the work of two of the most influential designers of the twentieth century. Featuring photography, film, architecture, exhibition-making, furniture and product design, the exhibition provided an insight into the lives of the designers, the Eames Office and the breadth of their ground-breaking work across many fields.<sup>7</sup> At the end of 2015, Somerset House presented *Big Bang Data* (3 December 2015 - 20 March 2016), an exhibition exploring how data is transforming the world through the work of artists, designers, journalists and visionaries. As the data explosion accelerates, the exhibition aimed to explore the meaning and implications of data for our future.<sup>8</sup> The above-mentioned exhibitions explored subjects across a range of design disciplines but they also generated extensive media coverage and attracted substantial audiences. Audiences further expanded when the exhibitions toured to international museum venues, perhaps reflecting the fact that design is playing a more significant role in culture as a whole and an acceptance of the design exhibition within the wider framework of art and design.

When the Design Museum opened in London in 1989, it was the first in the UK of a new type of specialist museum focusing on the collection, study and exhibition of design. At the time of its opening, it was one of a small number of high profile design and applied arts museums internationally that included the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York; the MAK in Vienna; the Design Museum in Helsinki and Vitra Design Museum in Germany.

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<sup>7</sup> Barbican: Press Release. Available at: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/the-world-of-charles-and-ray-eames> (Accessed 18.03.16).

<sup>8</sup> Somerset House: Press Release. Available at: <http://bigbangdata.somersetthouse.org.uk> (Accessed 18.03.16).



The last decade has witnessed an increasing number of design museums opening globally, inspired by the development of design museums across Europe. In 2007, 21\_21 Design Sight opened in Tokyo, the Design Museum of Barcelona opened in 2008 and in 2009 the Gallery of Australian Design opened in Canberra. Inspired by these models, China has established its first design museums in Shanghai and Shenzhen, and recruited its first design curators.<sup>9</sup> In April 2018 the International Design Museum of China opened in Hangzhou in east China's Zhejiang Province. Located on the campus of the China Academy of Art (CAA), the building was designed by Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza and covers a total floor area of 16,800 square metres. The museum is dedicated to “the presentation and research of modern and contemporary designs while stimulating home-grown innovations” and includes design studios, a children's workshop and a roof garden. In a series of interviews shortly after the museum's opening, Yuan Youmin, Deputy Curator of the gallery at CAA, commented that it was the country's first specialist design museum and was among the few professional design museums on such a large scale around the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Brendan Cormier, 'Introducing 'Values of Design' and China's First Design Museum', *V&A Blog*, 1 June 2007. Available at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/international-initiatives/introducing-values-of-design-and-chinas-first-design-museum> (Accessed 20.06.07).

<sup>10</sup> Xinhua/Weng Xinyang, 'China Design Museum launches first exhibitions in Hangzhou', *SINA*, 9 April 2018. Available at: [http://www.china.org.cn/photos/2018-04/09/content\\_50847922.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/photos/2018-04/09/content_50847922.htm). (Accessed 15.04.18).



**Fig. 2:** Collection display at The International Design Museum of China, Hangzhou, 2018.

In addition to a spate of new museums, established design and decorative arts museums have been undergoing profound changes and redefining themselves physically and online. In December 2014, following a three year closure, the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York reopened with a renovated building offering four floors of exhibition galleries including the first full-floor installation devoted to works from the museum's collection. In a press release issued by the museum, Caroline Baumann, Director of the Cooper Hewitt, commented:-

“The new Cooper Hewitt is a must-see and must-do destination to experience historical and contemporary design in a way like never before. The museum's dynamic exhibition programme, enhanced by interactive experiences that draw the visitor into the design process, will shape how people think about the power of design and ultimately, its capability to solve real world problems.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum: Press Release, 'Cooper Hewitt reopens after three-year renovation', 9 December 2014. Available at: <https://www.si.edu/news-desk/releases/cooper-hewitt-reopens-dec-12-after-three-year-renovation> (Accessed 18.03.16).

Holland Cotter, 'Newly Playful, by Design: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum Reopens', *The New York Times*, 11 December 2014. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/12/arts/design/cooper-hewitt-smithsonian-design-museum-reopens.html>. (Accessed 18.03.16).

In November 2016, London's Design Museum moved from its former location at Shad Thames in southeast London to reopen at the former Commonwealth Institute on Kensington High Street. Designed by John Pawson and OMA, two basement levels were excavated below the footprint of the original 1960s Grade II listed building, increasing its floor plan from 6,000 square metres to 10,000 square metres. The renovated building, with its distinctive copper-covered, hyperbolic paraboloid roof, offered three times more space in which to present larger scale exhibitions, a wider range of learning activities and events, and the opportunity to display the museum's collection on the top floor.<sup>12</sup> A carefully planned rebranding took the institution's name from "Design Museum" to "the Design Museum - the world's leading museum devoted to contemporary design in every form from architecture and fashion to graphics, product and industrial design."<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 3:** Interior view of the Design Museum, Kensington, London, 2016.

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<sup>12</sup> Design Museum: Press Release. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/new-design-museum> (Accessed 24.11.16).

<sup>13</sup> Jessica Mairs, 'London's new Design Museum by John Pawson and OMA unveiled', *Dezeen*, 17 November 2016. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2016/11/17/design-museum-opens-architecture-news-john-pawson-oma-kensington-london-uk/> (Accessed 20.11.16).

The Design Museum in London and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York are examples of a global expansion in design-focused museums. This expansion can be interpreted as a response to the growing importance of design, its increasing visibility and, as design critic Liz Farrelly has suggested; “the authority of the museum to speak for design.”<sup>14</sup>

As new design museums were built, and existing museums redefined, there was a simultaneous boom in museum studies and curator-led publications. During the late 1980s and 1990s one of the main developments driving change in the sector was the emergence of publications that examined the development of curatorship as an evolving practice.<sup>15</sup> These decades also saw the flourishing of curatorial training programmes across the UK and Europe. A series of postgraduate programmes were launched offering masters degree courses in the area. In 1994 the Curatorial Programme at De Appel, Amsterdam was established, followed by Curating at ZHdK, Zurich in 2005 and Design Curating and Writing at the Design Academy Eindhoven in 2014.<sup>16</sup>

In London, a large number of postgraduate courses in curating were established. In 1982 the Royal College of Art launched a masters programme in the History of Design, in partnership with the V&A. Other courses followed and included MA Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art; MFA Curating at Goldsmiths; MA Curating the Contemporary at London Metropolitan University in partnership with the Whitechapel Gallery; MA Curating the Art Museum at The Courtauld Institute of Art; MA Digital Curation at Kings College London and MA

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<sup>14</sup> Liz Farrelly, ‘Media in the Museum: Fashioning the Design Museum Curator at the Boilerhouse Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, London’, in Leah Armstrong and Felice McDowell (eds.), *Fashioning Identities: Identity and Representation at Work in the Creative Industries*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018: 29.

<sup>15</sup> Publications include Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> ‘New Masters Programme, Design Curating and Writing’, *Art&Education*, 2014. Available at: <https://www.artandeducation.net/announcements/107820/new-master-programme-design-curating-and-writing> (Accessed 19.07.17).

Curating and Collections at Chelsea College of Arts. The majority of courses had a strong focus on curating fine art and offered an educational platform for the teaching of the theory and practice of art curating exploring evolving definitions and alternative forms of curatorial inquiry and exhibition-making.

A significant development for the study of curating design was an MA in Curating Contemporary Design which was validated at Kingston University in 2001.<sup>17</sup> The masters programme was devised in close partnership with the Design Museum, London and began to deliver a training programme that responded to an important sector demand for creative people who could interpret and explain design culture within the museum, cultural and creative industries. I was part of this development working closely with the Course Director, Catherine McDermott, to establish the course at the Design Museum and develop two teaching modules that provided an introduction to the concepts and practices of curating design.

Writing in 2017, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Design Journal*, McDermott reflected that twenty years previously, “design curation was a practice discipline that simply did not exist... it was evident that there was a skills gap around the curation of contemporary design.”<sup>18</sup> McDermott noted that there were no emerging curators trained to work with end of twentieth century creative practice. McDermott credits the work of early museum directors, Stephen Bayley at the Boilerhouse Design Gallery and Paul Warwick Thompson at the Design Museum, who in her view helped to create a “live practice laboratory” that offered a starting point for a masters course in design curating practice.<sup>19</sup>

Now in its seventeenth year, MA Curating Contemporary Design combines

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<sup>17</sup> *Curating Contemporary Design: Definitive Field Document*, Faculty of Design, Kingston University, June 2000, MA CCD course files, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine McDermott, ‘Curating Contemporary Design - 20 Years of Change’, *The Design Journal*, Volume 20, 2017, Issue 3: 307 - 312.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: 307 - 312.

theory and practice and provides a unique training opportunity that brings together academic, museum and industry professionals. A combination of lectures, seminars, tutorials and practical workshops identifies the key ideas shaping curatorial practice and the core skills necessary to produce creative exhibitions, collection displays, learning and public programmes.<sup>20</sup>

The MA Curating Contemporary Design programme at Kingston University was quickly followed by other curatorial programmes. The courses formed an extensive international portfolio of training opportunities in this new field of practice which included MA Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion (LCF) and MA Narrative Environments at Central Saint Martins (CSM). This development has contributed to a growing pedagogy around design curating and its concomitant practice in the UK. Sarah Pierce suggests the new masters programmes in design curating have signalled “a turning tide”, not just in the field of curating but in the way that curators, artists and designers were beginning to understand the relationships between research and exhibition-making which fell outside the specialist knowledge areas of Art History or Fine Art.<sup>21</sup>

The programmes can be interpreted as the first stage in the emergence of a new curatorial discourse which was being led by, and for, a new generation of curators. The new courses were training curators and equipping them with skills that addressed traditional forms of research, writing and exhibition-making alongside training in new online platforms, broadcasting and more experimental media and display formats. More importantly, these courses indicate that design curating was developing as a new academic discourse and professional opportunity.

As a result of these new training programmes and increasing professional opportunities, since the late 1990s curating has expanded beyond the

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<sup>20</sup> At the time of writing, I continue in my role as Course Leader for MA CCD. Such a close connection with the course since 2002 has inevitably informed research for this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Pierce, ‘The Simple Operator’ in Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013: 97.

confines of those who care for collections and stage exhibitions. Curating now encompasses not only exhibition-making but also programming at many kinds of venues. An issue of the independent international journal, *On-Curating.org*, published in 2011, focused on aspects of curatorial practice in the public sphere and examined curating public space and public art in seven different cities around the world, without even a passing mention of museums.<sup>22</sup> Design curation has now emerged as a specific site of practice on an international stage. In museums, galleries, exhibitions, in public spaces, at design festivals and design weeks we see the results of curatorial practice. But what does design curating entail and how do design curators curate? These questions form the central research focus of this thesis and will be answered, partly, by personal reflection on my work in the field.

## **The Practice**

The thesis derives from my own professional practice and a substantial body of work within the institutional context of a design museum. It draws on over twenty-five years experience of curating design exhibitions and creative programmes, initially at the Barbican and subsequently at the Design Museum, London. As this thesis will demonstrate, the research undertaken reveals the importance of design museums, exhibitions and postgraduate training courses in the formation of a discourse on design and in focusing interest in the role of the design curator. It also reveals the role played by the Design Museum, London in the history and current condition of curating contemporary design in the UK and refers to my own career, as a design-focused curator and educator.

Ever since childhood, museums have held an irresistible fascination for me, as places of instruction and entertainment and they have played an important part in my professional life. After graduating from the University of Reading in 1988 with a BA in History of Art and Architecture, in 1989 I took up the role of Exhibition Assistant at the Barbican. At the time, the

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<sup>22</sup> 'Public Issues', *On-Curating.org* Issue 11, 2011: 1 - 88.

Barbican's programme presented exhibitions that focused on the areas of fine art, photography and sculpture, and design was not part of the gallery's remit. I assisted the curators with research and planning for exhibitions such as *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850 - 1930*, a collaboration with Setagaya Art Museum in Tokyo (17 October 1991 - 12 January 1992); *The Sixties Art Scene in London* (11 March - 13 June 1993) and *Bill Brandt* (30 September - 12 December 1993). The experience gave me a thorough grounding in the process of researching, planning and producing exhibitions with a fine art orientation, whilst also completing an MA in History of Art at Birkbeck College, the University of London. I subsequently progressed to the role of Exhibition Organiser and curated two major exhibitions, *Eric Gill: Sculpture* (11 November 1992 - 7 February 1993) and *Impressionism in Britain* (19 January - 7 May 1995).

In 1997 I joined the Design Museum as a Curator. This was my first experience of working in the environment of a design museum and introduction to the practice of curating design. My first exhibition project was on the mid-century Danish designer, Verner Panton; *Verner Panton: Light and Colour* (17 June - 10 October 1999). Exhibitions followed on the automotive designer Ferdinand Porsche, *Ferdinand Porsche: Design Dynasty 1900-1998* (9 April - 31 August 1998) and a survey show on the Modern Movement in Britain, *Modern Britain 1939-1999* (20 January - 6 June 1999) co-curated with the museum's Chief Curator, James Peto, now Head of Public Programmes at the Wellcome Collection.

In 1999, I left the Design Museum to take up a post at the British Film Institute (BFI) as Exhibitions Manager with responsibility for curating a touring exhibition to profile the collections of the Museum of the Moving Image following the closure of the museum to the public. In 2001 I returned to the Design Museum to take up the role of Senior Curator, at the invitation of its newly appointed Director, Alice Rawsthorn. I was later promoted to Head of Exhibitions. My role was wide ranging and involved delivering the exhibitions programme, directing the curatorial team,



curating high profile exhibitions, overseeing the Design Museum collection and establishing an archive of material relating to the history and development of the Design Museum.

Over fifteen years at the Design Museum, I curated exhibitions across a wide range of design disciplines. Exhibitions include *Cycle Revolution* (18 November 2015 - 30 June 2016), the final exhibition at the Design Museum's Shad Thames location before its move to Kensington in 2016; *Women Fashion Power* (29 October 2014 - 26 April 2015); *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* (15 November 2013 - 9 March 2014); *Christian Louboutin* (1 May - 9 July 2012); *Hussein Chalayan - From fashion and back* (22 January - 17 May 2009); *Formula One: The great design race* (1 July - 29 October 2006); *Saul Bass* (17 July - 10 October 2004) and *When Philip Met Isabella - Philip Treacy's hats for Isabella Blow* (5 July - 27 October 2002).<sup>23</sup> In 2002 I established an international touring programme at the museum in order to increase visibility, and expand the audience for Design Museum exhibitions. As previously discussed, I also helped to establish the museum's first postgraduate programme in Curating Contemporary Design in partnership with Kingston University. Working as part of the museum's senior leadership team, I contributed to strategic committees and to content and programming groups. I was also part of the team responsible for planning the next phase of the museum's development and its move to Kensington, west London in 2016.

In 2009 I negotiated a new role at the museum as Head of Curatorial which enabled me to focus on my specialist areas of interest; curating and teaching curatorial practice. In 2011, I embarked on study for a PhD at Kingston University and in 2015, I took the decision to become freelance. I now work outside of an institutional context as an independent curator, writer and educator. This change in context has afforded me the time to reflect on a career extending over twenty-five years and the development of professional practice over that time.

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<sup>23</sup> A full list of curated exhibitions is included in Appendix ii) at the end of this thesis.

My professional practice has allowed me to witness the development of curatorial theory and practice within the context of a design museum.<sup>24</sup> At the Design Museum I had the opportunity to work under three successive directors; Paul Warwick Thompson (1993-2001), Alice Rawsthorn (2001-2006) and Deyan Sudjic (2007-present), each of whom brought different agendas to the museum. Over time, I have been able to reflect on how the policies they implemented informed the development of programmes at the museum and influenced changes to the curator's role. This reflection informs Chapter 3 of this thesis.

In addition, my knowledge and expertise have been developed through curating a wide range of design exhibitions and teaching curating practice. Specific exhibitions have provided the context and opportunity to test new methodologies and experiment with different curatorial approaches.<sup>25</sup> Planning and leading two practice-focused modules on the MA Curating Contemporary Design programme and regular interaction with CCD students has revealed a continually evolving field of practice and the need to respond to an expanding skill set for the design curator. In addition to the traditional areas of research and concept development, the curator is now required to have a close engagement with the more commercial areas of communications, marketing, events, sponsorship, finance, retail and publishing. This development forms a central focus in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

### **A Practice under Scrutiny**

As a result of an evolving field of practice and new developments in the curator's role, curating has now come a long way from its traditional definition. Writing in 1996, art critic and curator, Lawrence Alloway succinctly described the curator's traditional duties as:-

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<sup>24</sup> At the time of writing, I hold the role of External Examiner to MA Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion and MA Curating and Collections at Chelsea College of Arts.

<sup>25</sup> The exhibitions include *Verner Panton: Light and Colour* (17 June - 10 October 1999); *Hussein Chalayan: From fashion and back* (22 January - 17 May 2009) and *Christian Louboutin* (1 May - 9 July 2012).

“(1) acquiring work for the museum, (2) supervising its preservation in store, and (3) displaying it, putting it on exhibition.”<sup>26</sup>

These traditional duties are connected to the running of a permanent collection and the act of arranging temporary exhibitions. In recent years, the term ‘curator’ has been used to describe activities in many different contexts. Today everything is curated from menus and interiors to playlists and phone apps. Google invite users to curate their profiles across a range of digital platforms. Restaurants provide menus curated by a food expert; the custodians of the newest drinking and eating establishment at Heathrow’s Terminal 3, *The Curator*, welcome customers to “the wonderful world of the curator” and aim to “introduce you to discoveries and innovations, expanding your knowledge, tempting your sophisticated palate to try new tastes and sensations, or reminding you of great dishes that perhaps you’d forgotten.”<sup>27</sup> The windows and displays inside department stores and fashion boutiques are described as being curated and include artwork and props in their carefully designed interiors. In the commercial world, the term ‘curator’ has come to designate someone who pulls together, sifts through and selects to create some sort of sense. This type of curating is not situated in museums and galleries but in restaurants, department stores, boutiques and online. Curators cater for the needs of a new breed of consumer who is ever more demanding and knowledgeable about what they consume and how.



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<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Alloway, ‘The Great Curatorial Dim-Out’ in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996: 221.

<sup>27</sup> Heathrow Airport website. Available at: <https://www.heathrow.com/shops-and-restaurants/restaurants-a-z/the-curator> (Accessed 10/09/18).



**Fig. 4:** (1) from L to R: *The Curator* Bar and Dining, Heathrow Airport Terminal 3; *Domestic Art, Curated Interiors*: Holly Moore, Assouline Press, 2008; *A Magazine curated by...*  
 (2) from L to R: *Curated Man* menswear boutique, Richmond, south west London; *The Curated Closet*: Anuschka Rees, Virgin Books, 2017; *How to Curate your Life: Work Life Balance for the Creative Entrepreneur*: Lizzie Evans, Podcasts, 2017.

In a digital age, the rise of social media has enabled anyone to share their opinions, to select and present, or curate a scenario through a plethora of digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter. With the flood of content being published on the Internet every day, the process of curation has become an important part of how many users find and personalise content. Content Curation is now a recognised term to describe the process of sorting through the vast amounts of content on the web and presenting it in a meaningful and organised way around a particular theme. A content curator cherry picks the most relevant content on a specific topic involving sifting, sorting, arranging and selecting information to share with their online community.

The process of content curation suggests a curatorial approach. It shares commonalities with the role of a museum curator who produces an exhibition by identifying the theme, providing the context, selecting the objects and making decisions about how to interpret and then display them for the public. A content curator is continually and consistently staying on top of a topic area and is a trusted resource for their audience. They are required to be discerning, discriminating and selective in only sharing the most relevant content. They specialise on a single specific topic and over time have the opportunity to become an authority, and

perhaps even a thought leader on that subject.



**Fig. 5:** From L to R: *Curated List of Digital Marketing Blogs in 2017*, Colorwhistle; *Content Curation*, Blog post, 2017.

Curator and documentary filmmaker, Steven Rosenbaum, has identified this development as part of a “curation nation” with brands, publishers and content entrepreneurs embracing the concept of curation to grow an existing business or launch a new one. Rosenbaum suggests that, as the sheer volume of digital information in the world increases, the demand for quality and context becomes more urgent and that curation is the only way to be competitive in the future.<sup>28</sup>

These new contexts enable everyone to “curate” with the result that the traditional role of curating within the museum is increasingly less understood. Curating has taken on a new meaning more frequently associated with a role that is more public-facing. These changing contexts for curating have generated a significant debate on the role of the curator. David Balzer has defined the shift as “Curationism” which he describes as the acceleration of the curatorial impulse to become a dominant way of thinking and being.<sup>29</sup> He suggests that since the 1990s we have been living in the “curationist” moment in which institutions and businesses rely on others, often variously credentialed experts, “to cultivate and organise things in an expression-cum-assurance of value and an attempt to make

<sup>28</sup> Steven Rosenbaum, *Curation Nation: How to win in a world where consumers are curators*, New York: McGraw Hill, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> David Balzar, *Curationism: How Curating took over the Art World and Everything Else*, London: Pluto Press, 2015: 2-3.

affiliations with, and to court, various audiences and consumers. As these audiences and consumers, we are cultivating and organising our identities.”<sup>30</sup>

Many would argue that the appropriation of the term represents a cynical exploitation of its traditional meaning. Steven Rosenbaum accepts that museum curators are forced to compete with media curation but he also makes two important distinctions. Firstly, that curation is about adding value from individuals who add their qualitative judgement to whatever is being gathered or organised implying that the use of the term ‘curator’ in any context lends an authority and status to the activity. And secondly, that there is amateur and professional curation, and the emergence of amateur and “prosumer” curators is not in any way a threat to professionals.<sup>31</sup>

Jean-Paul Martinon suggests that the fact that the curatorial seeps and bleeds into many different fields and practices, which some complain is a problem, is precisely what gives it its power and potential. It is also “what makes it quintessentially of our time and, inevitably, a difficult thing to define.”<sup>32</sup>

As curatorial and exhibition-making activity is increasingly performed by professionals who are not aligned to a particular institution, or responsible for a collection, debate over the definition and use of the term continues and alternative meanings are sought to accurately describe the activity of devising and producing exhibitions.

Sociologists Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollack describe the role of an exhibition author who devises the exhibition concept and also determines content and design as an “auteur”. They reference the field of film studies where the term has been used to describe an artist, such as a film director,

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<sup>30</sup> David Balzar, *Curationism: How Curating took over the Art World and Everything Else*, London: Pluto Press, 2015: 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Steven Rosenbaum, *Curation Nation: How to win in a world where consumers are curators*, New York: McGraw Hill, 2010: 3.

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013: 3.

who applies a highly centralized and subjective control to many aspects of a collaborative creative work.<sup>33</sup> The artist and critic, Robert Storr proposes the term “exhibition-maker” in relation to the activity of exhibition production as an alternative to curator because; “...it acknowledges the existence of a specific and highly complex discipline and separates the care or preservation of art - a curator’s primary concern - from its variable display.”<sup>34</sup> Storr’s definition implies a possible compression of activities traditionally seen as being the remit of distinct individuals, the curator and the exhibition designer.

In response to a practice under scrutiny and a growing discourse on the subject, Sarah Pierce asks, “How did we get to a place where the curatorial means so much? Does it matter? How? To when? Is the curatorial a condition? A device? Is it a field or subject?”<sup>35</sup> As a museum professional trained in the “traditional” duties of the curator and witnessing these changing definitions of the term over the course of my career, I return to Kate Fowle’s observation that opened this section. There is a need to understand what constitutes this multifaceted practice, specifically in relation to curating design.

### **Methodology: “The Reflective Practitioner”**

The mode of investigation employed in this thesis is that of a “reflective practitioner”, an approach pioneered by Donald A. Schön, a leading social scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His study published in 1983, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, presents a useful model for research into practice. Schön’s professional background as an industrial consultant, technology manager, urban

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<sup>33</sup> Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur’ in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996: 231-250.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Storr, ‘Show and Tell’ in Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Press, 2006: 14.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Pierce, ‘The Simple Operator’ in Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013: 97.

planner, policy analyst and teacher formed the background to his research which aimed to question the relationship between the kinds of knowledge honoured in academia and the kinds of competence valued in professional practice. Schön argues for the need for an inquiry into the epistemology of practice, based on a close examination of what practitioners actually do, as he explains:-

“What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage? How is professional knowing like and unlike the kinds of knowledge presented in academic textbooks, scientific papers and learned journals? In what sense, if any is there intellectual rigour in professional practice?”<sup>36</sup>

Over the course of Schön's research, he examined five professions - architecture, engineering, management, psychotherapy and town planning to show how professionals working in those fields approached problem solving. He argues that, in order to meet the challenges of their work, professionals working in these areas relied less on formulas learned in graduate school and more on the kind of improvisation learned in practice, a knowledge that is experiential and rarely verbalised or theorised. Schön defines this largely unexamined knowledge as “reflection-in-action” to show precisely how the process works and how it might be fostered in future professionals.

As a conceptual methodology, the “reflective practitioner” is relevant for my research as it provokes a process of self-questioning into my practice as a curator and into the ways in which design exhibitions are curated. As Schön argues, “the reflective practitioner” engages in reflective conversations with their situations by reflection on their patterns of action, on the situations in which they are performing and on the know-how implicit in their performance. They are reflecting *on* action and, in some cases, reflecting *in* action. They draw on repertoires of cumulatively

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<sup>36</sup> Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*, USA: Basic Books Inc., 1983: viii.



developed knowledge and build up a repertoire of new cases, maxims and methods.<sup>37</sup> Not infrequently, their experiments yield surprising results that cause them to reformulate their questions and which contributes to an existing store of knowledge:-

“What I want to propose is this. The practitioner has built up a repertoire of examples, images, understandings and actions. A practitioner’s repertoire includes the whole of his experience insofar as it is accessible to him for understanding and action.”<sup>38</sup>

Schön argues that it is necessary to demystify professional knowledge<sup>39</sup>, a view supported by Paul O’Neill some thirty years later when he notes that demystification is now widely accepted within curatorial discourse as a method of defining and representing a curatorial position.<sup>40</sup> Curator Annie Fletcher took the debate a step further when she called for “a level of mediated super visibility.”<sup>41</sup> In Fletcher’s view, there is an assumption that an exhibition has been curated. The curator’s stated remit now incorporates the process of demystification as an inherent part of the practice in which to supply information, to be open and to be transparent is paramount. The effects of such super visibility helps to shape the conversations around curatorship and maintain a dominant discourse.<sup>42</sup>

The discourse continued in January 2014 at a symposium organised in Amsterdam by the Stedelijk Museum in collaboration with the De Appel Curatorial programme. The premise, *What Do We Do When We Are Doing It?*, recognised that most cultural producers feel a need to re-evaluate how they work and how processes can be optimised, even if the methodologies

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<sup>37</sup> Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*, USA: Basic Books Inc., 1983: 265.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.: 138.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.: 340.

<sup>40</sup> Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2012: 34.

<sup>41</sup> Annie Fletcher cited in Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2012: 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: 34-35.

they use seem to be working without major flaws. The symposium brought together artists, curators, and researchers to reflect on current developments and urgencies within curatorial practice and challenge to what extent these professional tendencies are reflected in the curricula of curatorial education structures and to discuss how they might influence a future school of curating.<sup>43</sup>

Adopting the research methodology of “reflective practitioner”, I developed four research questions as a framework for this thesis; What is unique about the practice of curating design?, What are the key shifts that have influenced design curating practice over the last two decades?, How can design exhibitions draw audiences into personal, transformative encounters with the work displayed?, How has my research contributed to professional practice at the Design Museum, and more broadly to the field of design curation? I chose to focus my research on the relationships and practices that constitute the design exhibition through an analysis of an exhibition I curated for the Design Museum in 2013, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*. The research was designed to reveal what has been largely concealed; how design exhibitions are curated and the distinctiveness of the role of the design curator. It also provides a perspective on the more recent developments in design curating as practice and discourse within the context and culture of the Design Museum, London.

### **The Discourse on Curating: “A Blind Spot”**

This thesis is positioned within, and responds to a body of scholarly work on museology and curatorial practice. A substantial amount of research has been undertaken into the origins and purpose of museums and the role of the art and decorative arts curator. As my research revealed, the practice of design curating is an under-investigated subject, despite being

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<sup>43</sup> *What do we do when we are doing it?* was part of a three-year research project supported by the AMMODO Foundation and focused on the future trajectory of the Curatorial Programme at De Appel Arts Centre, which included a series of closed expert and alumni meetings, workshops, and public conferences.

a growth area over the last twenty years. Curating design is a relatively young field with a short history. It borrows from the more established disciplines of art history and cultural studies. In recent years, there have been a plethora of publications on curating but they have mostly focused on the area of fine art curation, with design curation remaining largely unexplored and the design curator's *raison d'être* undefined.

Jens Hoffmann writing in 2010 about his rationale for creating a journal of curatorial studies, *The Exhibitionist*, commented that “one measure of the vitality of a discipline is the intensity of the debate surrounding it.”<sup>44</sup> Hoffmann goes on to say that the discussion around curatorial practice has intensified over the last decade, including the founding of numerous academic programmes, the creation of conferences and the publication of an increasing number of specialised books. He also notes that the discipline has not, up until now, had a consistent platform of more frequent and interconnected conversations that bring together the many fragments of the current dialogue. Whilst Hoffmann's comments are directed towards all forms of curatorial practice, a review of the content of issues of *The Exhibitionist* reveal that they are predominantly focused on art curating. The design exhibition and design curating is neglected as a topic for discussion which seems to suggest that there is an urgent need for critique and self-reflection. This is important in order to be able to position design curating practice within an existing history of curatorial practice, identifying urgent issues and suggesting future directions for practice.

In spite of the fact that design curating is a rapidly expanding field of practice, the area remains largely undocumented, seeming to occupy “a blind spot” in histories of curating with few critical histories of the practice. Design historian and former V&A curator, Gareth Williams has noted that design in the museum context has historically occupied a peripheral position within exhibition-making:

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<sup>44</sup> Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *The Exhibitionist: Journal on Exhibition Making - The first six years 2010-2016*, New York: Artbook / D.A.P., 2017: 29.

“Museums have had a chequered relationship with design, at various times seeing it as the poor relation of architecture, as commercialised fine art, as evidence of social or technological history, or as the antithesis of craft skills. Design practice, as opposed to other disciplines implied in this list, seems to find it hard to be considered as an autonomous subject although the emergence of design history has a vibrant and independent strand of scholarship in the last two or three decades has done much to differentiate the identity of design from art, craft or technology...design has been in the blind spot of museums.”<sup>45</sup>

Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell comment, in their introduction to a collection of essays in *Design Objects and the Museum*, that design museums have received far less critical attention than art museums. Farrelly and Weddell observe that “the museology of the art museum has been extensively discussed, published and taught while that of the design museum has received less attention.”<sup>46</sup> They suggest that this imbalance reflects the status and position of the functional objects housed by museums of design compared with fine art together with a lack of historical depth of scholarship. They argue that the specific concerns of design museums continue to be neglected and that this seems to confirm broader uncertainties about the status and value of design museum’s collections and displays.

The views of design commentators such as Williams, Farrelly and Weddell connect to a broader discussion around a mystification or lack of understanding around what curators do, and how this is overlooked in both academic and more public-facing literature. In newspaper reviews and design journals, the final exhibition is publicly critiqued but curators rarely reveal or publish the thinking, inspiration and processes behind an exhibition. Whilst art curating has an evolved historiography with self-reflective practitioners interested in charting the history and practice of its output through books, conferences and contributions to online forums, the history of curating contemporary design is marginally covered.

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<sup>45</sup> Gareth Williams, ‘On the Problematic Relationship Between Institutions and Critical Design Thinking’ in Freda Jeppsson (ed.), *In Case of Design - Inject Critical thinking*, Stockholm, 2010: 27.

<sup>46</sup> Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (eds.), *Design Objects and the Museum*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012: xx.

This becomes particularly apparent when reviewing the multiple texts that explore the development of curatorial practice over the last two decades.<sup>47</sup> These studies are either anthologies that typically comprise the collected writings and interviews of a single curator or which bring together the perspectives of a group of curators. The publications are generally intended to undertake a mapping of the terrain of curating from a critical perspective and by drawing on the insights of leading practitioners in the field.

Hans Ulrich Obrist has written extensively about curating from the perspective of a practitioner and in his role as Co-Director of Exhibitions and Programmes at the Serpentine Gallery in London. From the very beginning of his career, Obrist has undertaken an ongoing and expansive project to interview artists and creatives. The collection of interviews, known as *The Interview Project*, consists of over 2,000 hours of interviews representing the cultural figures that have defined modern life. The project has inspired a host of publications authored by Obrist. *A Brief History of Curating*, published in 2008, carried interviews with pioneering curators in the art field including Anne d'Harnoncourt, Walter Hopps and Harald Szeemann. The publication was intended to map the evolution of the curatorial field, from early independent curating in the 1960s and 1970s and the experimental institutional programmes that developed in Europe and America at the time, through to new curatorial formats, such as Documenta and the expansion of biennales<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Publications include: Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich: JRP / Ringier, 2008; Carolee Thea, *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2009; Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011; Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Press, 2006; Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2012; Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013; Jens Hoffmann, (ed.), *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, Milan: Mousse Publishing, Fiorucci Art Trust, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2008.

In 2011, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Curating* continued the series of interviews with artists and practitioners but this time Obrist adopted a slightly different approach where the interviewer becomes the interviewee, with the intention of revealing what it means to be the curator. The publications by Obrist are interesting for two reasons. Firstly, they attempt to demystify the role of the curator (and practitioner) and secondly, they are a manifestation of the developing role of the curator. Obrist represents a new type of curator initiating new formats, who works inside the institution but who also operates outside of it.

In 2009 Carolee Thea's anthology of interviews with ten leading curators examined similar territory. *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators* explores the intellectual convictions and personal visions that lay the groundwork for some of the most prestigious and influential international exhibitions. When taken together the interviews provide a fascinating insight into the practice and thought processes of some of the most creative individuals shaping the way that art is experienced in the present moment, but once again the *raison d'être* of the design curator is very much neglected.<sup>49</sup> With the publication in 2013 of *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, the approach is the same. Editor Jens Hoffmann invited ten international curators to each propose, and then respond to one question relating to contemporary curating and exhibition-making. Hoffmann points out in his introductory essay that, in its adolescence, curating was transitioning from an open, creative, largely undefined practice to a diverse professional arena with many highly specialised branches of knowledge and practice. Hoffmann acknowledges that "...a recalibration of what a curator is and does seems both necessary and urgent", but his collection of interviews addresses the role and practice of the art curator within the context of the art exhibition, and ignores the canon of design curating.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Carolee Thea and Thomas Micchelli (eds.), *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Jens Hoffmann (ed.), *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, Mousse Publishing, Fiorucci Art Trust, 2013: 9.

Recent scholarship has provided a significant step forward in concentrating thinking around curatorial practice in a broader context. Published in 2006, *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* was one of the first texts to offer a considered commentary on contemporary practice and which finally brought the design curator into the debate. Editor Paula Marincola commissioned fourteen essays from international curators and historians to address one of the central questions of curating that frequently remains unframed: What makes an exhibition great? The book focuses on the curation of contemporary art in North America and Europe with contributions from art curator Robert Storr; Director of the Studio Museum, Harlem, Thelma Golden and Director of London's Whitechapel Art Gallery, Iwona Blazwick. Only one contribution, an interview with Paola Antonelli, Senior Curator of Design and Architecture at MoMA, New York, offers a specific focus on practice from a curator working in the design field. In the interview Antonelli is questioned as to why she thinks curators of design and architecture are often left out of the new discourse. She responds:-

“When we talk about curators, the first thing we think about is art. Maybe it is because art curators often come from academia, and moreover from the same institutions...architecture and design curators are often architects. They usually do not have PhDs.”<sup>51</sup>

Whilst this comment can be disputed, Antonelli's response does indicate a perceived subordinate status of design in comparison to art and a reluctance at this point for curating design to be taken seriously, a fact that seems to be supported by the lack of literature on the subject. Hans Ulrich Obrist offers an alternative explanation. In an interview with Paul O' Neill he states:-

“At a moment when there is so much talk about curating there is no exhibition literature...it has a lot to do with the fact that exhibitions are not collected and that's why they fall deeper into amnesia.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Paola Antonelli interviewed by Bennett Simpson in Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006: 93.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist cited in Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2012: 41.

He further claims that this amnesia “not only obscures our understanding of experimental exhibition history, it also effects innovative curatorial practice.” In his view exhibitions contribute to the creation of new curatorial knowledge and practice and they can also push the boundaries toward the invention of new curatorial structures. Over the last decade, Obrist’s interviews with many of the leading artists and curators from the last few decades about the thinking behind their exhibitions can be seen as a means of addressing such an historical amnesia.

In the present moment, the curatorial field is being influenced by a multitude of cross-cultural and global conversations by curators who are opening up new definitions of curating, processes and ways of working. Three books, Terry Smith’s *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), Paul O’Neill’s, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2012) and Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) opened up a broader debate and provided new contextualisations of what the term, ‘curatorial’ means and how the discourse around it has developed. In *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Terry Smith argues that it is now imperative to study the role that design exhibitions have played in both concretising and critiquing technological and cultural shifts:-

“While it is widely accepted that the role has been professionalised... with a ‘coming of age’ occurring in the 1990s, we are still fumbling to pinpoint what really constitutes contemporary curating.”<sup>53</sup>

Smith suggests that the notion of a language around curating is still nascent, or at best, tentative, and asks what is distinctive about contemporary curatorial thought.

Running alongside a debate about the nature of the curatorial, has been a debate about the purpose of museums. An increase in the number of museums and a rise in the perceived value of visiting museums has

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<sup>53</sup> Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2012: 9.



resulted in a concomitant growth in professionalisation of the field. Museology is a broad field of enquiry that has a longer history as a discipline than design history. There is a rich academic literature exploring the history and underlying philosophy of museums that collect, display and interpret objects. My research focused on the various ways in which museums have been established and developed, their educative role and how this gave rise to the development of the curator. The literature called upon is wide ranging and crosses the fields of museums studies, museum education, design history, design culture and design studies, visitor studies and learning theory. There are a number of texts that are key sources for the history and development of museums and their role in society, namely Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe* (Oxford University Press, 1985); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Anthony Burton, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, V&A Publications, 1999) and Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (London: One-Off Press, 2000). These sources helped to locate the study in its historical moment and shaped the structure for Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The contexts in which museums operate is a rapidly shifting landscape and the museum has been the subject of close scrutiny and perpetual critique and revision. From the late 1980s, a number of key debates in the museum sector responded to political and social changes and generated a wealth of new research in the field. An important source of these new ideas can be traced back to an anthology, *The New Museology* edited by Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989). It heralded the beginnings of a plethora of literature on museums. Significantly it contributes to a specific area of my research, published in the year that the Design Museum opened in London. Vergo diagnosed a widespread dissatisfaction with “old museologies”. At a time of unprecedented growth and interest in museums and exhibitions, but also at a time when museums were facing a

shortage of funding and an underlying lack of direction, he launched a controversial debate about the role of museums in society. Vergo called for an urgent re-examination that focused less on museum's methods and more on the purposes of museums.<sup>54</sup> The interest in a new museology was connected to a huge increase in museums in Britain, mostly funded by the National government or by local authorities.<sup>55</sup> Vergo's approach to museology put an emphasis on visitors and their experience in the museum and argued for new thinking about accessibility, the social function of the museum, participation programmes and education. An important result of this new museology was a more visitor-centred approach to museum management which would help museums to compete with other educational and leisure institutions in the contemporary world.

Uncovering debates about the purpose of museums and their educational role as general learning environments led to an examination of literature exploring the different learning theories which have influenced the contemporary museum. These studies argue that museums need to stimulate an intrinsic motivation to encourage visitors to learn. Of particular relevance to this thesis are the writings of pioneer museum directors such as John Cotton Dana, the founder of the Newark Museum in New Jersey. Writing in 1910, Dana advocated the museum as an alive and active institution offering entertainment, enlightenment and education. He described the ideal museum environment as being "an open workshop of delight and learning" and an "institute of visual instruction."<sup>56</sup> The research of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has been an essential source of information and ideas, particularly *Museums and their Visitors* (London: Routledge,

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989: 3.

<sup>55</sup> Fiona Candlin states that by the mid-1960s there were 900 museums and this figure rose to 2,500 in the late 1980s opening at the rate of one every fortnight, one per week or even three a week. Worldwide, some ninety-five per cent of museums were founded after World War II, in 'Independent Museums, Heritage, and the Shape of Museum Studies', *Museum and Society*, 10(1), March 2012: 29.

<sup>56</sup> John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, edited by W.A. Peniston, Washington DC: The Newark Museum Association, New Jersey & The American Association of Museums, 1999: 65.

1994) and *The Educational Role of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1999), and the research of John Falk and Lynn Dierking in *The Museum Experience Revisited* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

In 2005 Graham Black entered the debate with two publications, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (London: Routledge, 2005) and *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-first Century* (London: Routledge, 2011). Black argued that museums must transform themselves if they are to remain relevant to twenty-first century audiences. For most of the twentieth century the primary role of museums had been to collect objects, classify, document, conserve and put them on display. Black was recognising that over the last two decades, society had changed, bringing with it new demands on the cultural sector. Modern museums needed to justify their existence, generate far more of their own income and broaden their audience.

Such debates within the museum sector from the late 1990s were leading to changes in how museums perceived themselves and inspiring new approaches to museum management and the practice of curating. These sources helped to locate this study in its historical and contemporary moment and informed the content for Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Over the course of my research, I discovered an absence of literature on design curating practice written from a practitioner's perspective in contrast to those publications that examine the museum from a cultural, political or social perspective. This position is illustrated by curator and critic, Bruce Ferguson, when he asserts that the critical industry based around museology has so far paid little attention to the architectonics of exhibitions.<sup>57</sup> These citations support my view that the critical literature published in relation to curatorial practice rarely focuses on a detailed analysis of how exhibitions are made, while the literature that focuses on exhibition scenography or design generally consist of illustrated case studies with little critique or analysis.

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<sup>57</sup> Bruce Ferguson in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996: 176.

Zoë Ryan, Curator of Architecture and Design at The Art Institute of Chicago has noted how exhibitions have long played a vital role in making and remaking architecture and design history. They bring together key figures and bodies of work, position ideas and present arguments, shed light on current concerns, suggest future directions and draw connections with larger, theoretical, political and cultural conversations.<sup>58</sup> They accomplish these goals through the choice of works to display, the exhibition design, the interpretive materials, the associated programming and the catalogue. *As Seen: Exhibitions that made Architecture and Design History*, edited by Zoë Ryan (The Art Institute of Chicago, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017) is one of the first publications to explore landmark architecture and design exhibitions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and the essential role they have played in the history of architecture and design. As such, the publication contributes to developing a literature on the subject of the design exhibition and to acknowledging the role of the curator in the formation of these exhibitions.

Alongside a review of recently published literature on curatorial practice, design exhibitions of the 1990s and 2000s and their documentation have informed my research. I have drawn on a diverse range of material which includes official policy documents, discussions on curating published by contemporary design magazines and journals, conference papers, symposium notes, audio and published interviews with leading curators. Analysis of specific exhibitions at the Design Museum, London and at other institutions in the UK and internationally, has helped to foster an understanding of approaches to practice in the field but also to understand what constitutes the role of the contemporary design curator. I have drawn on associated publications, such as exhibition guides and catalogues, together with the more ephemeral material that accompanies exhibitions including, press releases, panel texts, media reviews, publicity material and web-based resources as reference for my thesis, largely drawn from a

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<sup>58</sup> Zoë Ryan (ed.), *As Seen: Exhibitions that made Architecture and Design History*, The Art Institute of Chicago, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017: 13.

personal archive developed over the last twenty-five years. Exhibition guides have played an important role in the research process not only for their conventional interpretive function, but also as a useful *aide memoire* when reviewing the exhibition as they often present the layout of an exhibition, the main thematic section texts (as they appeared in the exhibition) and a detailed account of each exhibit.

My research has also drawn on a parallel publishing industry that has emerged in response to the curator's enhanced visibility within the field of contemporary design. Design magazines have begun to focus on curatorial practice as a major subject for discussion. They include *The Journal of Curatorial Studies* (since 2012), the online journal, *On-Curating.org* (since 2010), *The Exhibitionist* (since 2010) and *Manifesta Journal* (since 2003). The 1980s opened up a new market and newfound field of study centred on the medium of the design exhibition and those involved in its mediation on a global scale. Since the 1980s journalists, historians, cultural theorists and arts practitioners have aired their opinions in newspapers and design journals such as *Blueprint*, *Wallpaper* and the award winning architecture and design online magazine *Dezeen* which curates a selection of design and interior projects from around the world. Publications written by former Design Museum Directors, Stephen Bayley, Alice Rawsthorn and Deyan Sudjic have helped to provide a theoretical insight into current issues and ongoing debates with the design industry and design education.<sup>59</sup>

The exhibitions and publications of the British Council, the UK's international organisation for cultural relations, provide well-documented surveys of the the culture and industry of design during the 1990s and 2000s and have contributed to my research. Of particular relevance are a series of papers published by the Architecture, Design, Fashion

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<sup>59</sup> Publications include; Stephen Bayley, *Commerce and Culture: From Pre-Industrial Art to Post-Industrial Value*, London: Design Museum, 1989; Alice Rawsthorn, *Hello World: Where Design Meets Life*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013; Deyan Sudjic, *The Language of Things*, London: Penguin Books, 2008.

department between 2011 and 2014 in which experts in the sector were commissioned to write on particular issues that were pertinent to current practice in the UK. The ADF Papers explored new directions in British architecture, design and fashion through specific themes or a series of case studies. Subjects were wide ranging and included areas such as design collectives, fashion as installation, sustainability in design, 3D printing and social design.<sup>60</sup>

The histories of institutions and their display practices have also informed research for this thesis. Mary Staniszewski's *The Power of Display: A history of exhibition installation at the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998) has offered detailed insights into the role of curating and exhibition design in exhibitions at MoMA. In the study, Staniszewski claims that Western art history has overlooked the role played by curating, exhibition design and spatial exploration in the early exhibitions forms of the twentieth century. In examining exhibition designs, displays and installations as part of the history of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, she emphasises the influential part played by artists, designers and curators such as Alfred H. Barr, Herbert Bayer, Frederick Kiesler, László Moholy-Nagy and William Sandberg in contributing to this discipline. Anthony Burton's study of the V&A, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, V&A Publications, 1999) has provided valuable context. David Dernie's, *Exhibition Design* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2006) offers a contemporary commentary on the developing practice of exhibition design through a series of case studies of exhibitions at museums, trade fairs and commercial spaces around the world. Tom Wilson's more recent publication, *The Story of the Design Museum* (Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016) has provided a succinct account of the history and development of the Design Museum, London across three different sites.

The work of practicing curators has also proved to be valuable in offering

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<sup>60</sup> ADF Papers, published by the British Council's Architecture, Design, Fashion department, were launched on 28 July 2011. Available at: <https://design.britishcouncil.org/blog/2011/jul/28/launch-adf-papers/> (Accessed 25.10.18).

different perspectives on curating exhibitions across the disciplines of architecture, design and fashion, such as Sarah Chaplin and Alexandra Stara (eds.), *Curating Architecture and the City* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2009); Adrian George's manual of curating practice, *The Curator's Handbook: Museums, Commercial Galleries, Independent Spaces* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015); Alex Newson, Eleanor Suggett and Deyan Sudjic, *Designer Maker User* (Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016) and Annamari Vänskä and Hazel Clark (eds), *Fashion Curating: Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2018).

Archival research has also provided a fertile source of information relating to the origins of the Design Museum and its subsequent development.<sup>61</sup> A review of minutes to Trustee and Curatorial Committee meetings; promotional brochures, policy documents and media reviews located in the Design Museum Archive and the V&A Archive (Boilerhouse Papers) revealed the discussions and ideas informing the establishment of The Boilerhouse Project and its later incarnation as the Design Museum.

It is into this body of scholarly work on museology and curatorial practice, and a perceived gap in literature on the practice of curating contemporary design, that this research is positioned. The thesis aims to contribute to the critical language and debate around design curating practice as examined through the practitioner's lens.

## Summary of Thesis Structure

This PhD submission comprises two parts - The Thesis (**Part One**) and a Portfolio of Work (**Part Two**).

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<sup>61</sup> The Design Museum Archive was established in 2011 by Donna Loveday and MA Curating Contemporary Design graduate, Eszter Gero. The archive acts as the principal repository for all written and visual material documenting the history of the Design Museum, policies, programmes and exhibitions, from its beginnings to the present.

**Part One** comprises four chapters and serves to firmly locate the study in its historical, cultural and contemporary context. The research presented in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 introduces and surveys rapid developments in the field of curatorial practice. Chapters 3 and 4 locate, introduce and discuss my practice-informed research. The chapters may be summarised as follows:-

### **Chapter 1:**

*Displaying Designed Objects in Museum and Exhibition Contexts (1800s - 2000)* contextualises my investigation by mapping the history of displaying designed objects in museum and exhibition contexts, as a means of identifying the key moments that are pertinent to the development of the design museum and the design exhibition. The research situates the museum as an institution with particular purposes, responsibilities and methods of operation. The emergence of public museums and professional curators in the early twentieth century influenced their political and organisational structures. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the specificity of the discipline of design and its relation to the design museum which emerged in the early twentieth century to become a cultural and operating institution in its own right. The historical, theoretical and cultural discussions that have informed the development of the design museum and design curating are discussed through an analysis of relevant literature and case studies.

### **Chapter 2:**

*The Curatorial Turn (1980 - 2018)* identifies and analyses the culture around curating since the 1980s and the main discursive trends and broader shifts that have emerged within contemporary curating practice, a period marked by moments when the boundaries constituting the role of the curator and the field in which they operated significantly expanded. It contributes to an understanding of when and why certain issues emerged in relation to broader political, economic, social and technological factors and how these changes impacted on museums and the visitor experience.



I also examine how such shifts influenced the development of curating practice more broadly and the way in which design exhibitions were conceived and presented.

### **Chapter 3:**

*The Development of the Design Museum, London (1980 - 2018)* brings the research discussed in previous chapters together with a specific focus on the Design Museum, London. It explores the establishment and development of the first Design Museum in the UK, from its beginnings as The Boilerhouse Project in the basement of the V&A, London (1982-1986); its opening as the Design Museum at Shad Thames in south-east London (1989 - 2015) and its latest reincarnation and move to the former Commonwealth Institute, Kensington (2016 -present). The Design Museum is hugely significant to the history and current status of curating design in the UK. The Design Museum also provides the context for the development of my own practice as a design curator and serves to locate the reflection on my practice explored in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter 4:**

This section of the thesis seeks to understand and represent the practice of design curating, through a critical reflection on a specific example of my practice. It examines the Design Museum exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* (15 November 2013 - 22 June 2014). Adopting the mode of a “reflective practitioner” and by literally ‘unravelling the practice’, I attempt to outline the form of the project, as well as the thinking behind it. Drawing on material produced during the curating process, I discuss the research, ideas, processes, decisions, tensions and compromises that contributed to the exhibition’s final form. The material includes concept documents, design briefs, concept layouts for 3D and 2D Design, final tender drawings, media reviews in response to the exhibition together with images of the exhibition in its final form as presented at the Design Museum.

The intended outcome of this reflective analysis is to “demystify” the process of curating the exhibition and provide an enhanced understanding of one example of curating design in the context of the museum.

The thesis concludes with a summary of the shifts and examples of practice discussed and their implications for the way the practice of design curating and the design curator’s role in museums is understood. In so doing, the research aims to contribute meaningfully to a growing historiography of design curation and to an understanding of the expanding role of the design curator.

**Part Two** comprises a Portfolio of Work that forms a written, visual and oral record of the research-informed practice undertaken for the case study exhibition. The research material is presented on a CD included alongside the thesis. It is documented in separate sections to reflect the chronology of the exhibition’s execution and to show the progression of the project. The documentation serves to support the reflective practice component of the thesis (Chapter 4) and provide evidence of my approach to curating the exhibition.

## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **Displaying Designed Objects in Museum and Exhibition Contexts, 1800s - 2000**

**“The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place at all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organising in this a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity.”**

Michel Foucault (1986)<sup>62</sup>

#### **1.1 Cabinets of Curiosities and The Formation of the Public Museum**

The practice of curating design is connected to a longer history of collecting and displaying objects that can be traced back to the fifteenth century. It is also connected to a more recent development; the formation of the public museum and various trade initiatives during the nineteenth century which placed a special focus on the manufactured and mass produced object. In an essay ‘Of Other Spaces’, philosopher Michel Foucault considers that the impulse to accumulate and archive is a modern phenomenon and from which he derives his theory of the “heterotopia”. He defines heterotopias as a range of cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow ‘different’; disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet upsetting what is outside. Foucault provides many examples of these spaces, such as ships, cemeteries, brothels, prisons, gardens of antiquity, fairs, Turkish baths but also the library and the museum.

Referencing Foucault’s theory of heterotopia some ten years later, museologist Tony Bennett argues that the museum is characteristic of nineteenth century Western culture, representing a new space of modernity fashioned to achieve order and rationality from the chaotic

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<sup>62</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics* 16, Spring 1986: 22-27.

disorder that had characterised the museum's precursors.<sup>63</sup>

Much has been written about the formation of the public museum and its early development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> In *The Curator's Egg* published in 2000, Karsten Schubert explores the evolution of the museum concept from the French Revolution to the present day and in so doing, demonstrates that from the outset the museum has been the subject of close scrutiny and perpetual critique and revision. As he notes in his introductory essay:-

“The museum concept's own history has greatly contributed to the complexity of the picture: much of what constitutes today's museum is based on past record and institutional precedent. Without a look at history, today's museum would be virtually indecipherable.”<sup>65</sup>

Schubert's observation supports my own approach to the value of looking back in order to understand the present, particularly when dealing with a relatively recent phenomenon, the design museum. In order to be able to successfully interrogate and understand contemporary curating practice, it is necessary to identify the significant events that enabled the museum to become a site for collecting, conserving and studying the industrial object and manufacturing process. At a certain point, the decorative arts museum, and later the design museum, emerged from the general public museum to become a cultural and operating institution in its own right, giving rise to a new type of curatorial practice.

Through an interrogation of literature in the broad territory of museum studies, design history and material culture, I have identified six key

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<sup>63</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995: 2.

<sup>64</sup> Publications include: Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1985; Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995 and Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, London: One-Off Press, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, London: One-Off Press, 2000: 10.

developments which have had an implication for the design museum. This chapter investigates how a set of historical, political, legislative, social and cultural factors informed the development of the public museum. They promoted shifts that were to set the scene for the development of the design museum, the design exhibition and its concomitant practice. Key to an understanding of the emergence of the design museum is the way in which objects, originally housed in cabinets and previously concealed from public view, were brought into new, open and public contexts. In addition, the types of objects collected, that included the products of an industrial society, went on to form the early collections of the decorative arts museum.

According to Stefan Nowotny, the first curators seem to have appeared under the name of *curatores rei publicae* around the year 100 AD. These 'curators of public affairs' were representatives of the Imperial Roman government, whose main task was to maintain public order and look after the finances of the city they were deputed to govern.<sup>66</sup> As Nowotny has identified, these first curators had a well-defined responsibility which was oriented towards the good of the public and the common wealth. Modern curators whose activities came to be related to museums were for a long time confined to more limited concerns; the taking care of things which included artefacts and objects that were considered to have some kind of extraordinary value or significance to human knowledge or that testified to an exceptional capacity of creation. These procedures were closely linked to the emergence of new fields of knowledge, from anthropology to aesthetics, and of new practices of appropriation and dispatch, display and contemplation.<sup>67</sup>

The foundation of Europe's great publicly funded institutions such as the British Museum and the Louvre go back more than two hundred years to the latter part of the eighteenth century. But, as Schubert has commented,

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<sup>66</sup> Stefan Nowotny, 'The Curator crosses the River: A Fabulation' in Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013: 61.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.: 62.

there is an even longer history when the museum was first and foremost a study collection with a library attached; a repository for objects and a place of learning for scholars, philosophers and historians.<sup>68</sup> Such collections developed as a result of the collecting practices of individuals, typically monarchs, aristocrats and wealthy merchants. The collections inspired the cabinet of curiosities, a phenomenon which became fashionable throughout Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In July 1983 an international symposium titled 'The Cabinet of Curiosities' was organised by Dr Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor of the Ashmolean museum in Oxford to explore the somewhat neglected subject of the nature and development of early collections and their relationship to the early history of museums. The papers delivered at the symposium were published in 1985 as *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*. As Impey and MacGregor argue, the cabinet of curiosities were the main Western precursors to museums and the first signs of the modern design museum unfold directly from these beginnings.<sup>69</sup> This section concentrates on three areas of this development which have implications for the later development of design museums and the practice of displaying designed objects; the purpose of the collection; the content of the collection and its arrangement and a gradual move towards cataloguing content and enabling public access.

As Impey and MacGregor's research identifies, the passion for collecting emerged in Renaissance Europe and derived from the secular collecting practices of European princes and monarchs who amassed art and artefacts of every conceivable kind. The earliest collections comprised the products of antiquity with statues and architectural fragments uncovered through the excavations of Roman ruins that were conducted from 1450 to 1550. From this classical starting point, collections soon proliferated in

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<sup>68</sup> Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, London: One-Off Press, 2000: 17.

<sup>69</sup> Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1985: 1.

bewildering diversity. The discovery of the New World and the opening up of contacts with Africa, South-east Asia and the Far East enabled collectors to establish collections of animal specimens, clothing, weapons, tools and utensils which promoted a growing awareness of these objects as representative of the societies which produced them. As Oleg Neverov has commented:-

“The desire arose to amass tangible evidence of all the exciting, new, and hitherto unsuspected discoveries being made all over the world in that dynamic age. Exotic animals and plants, strange clothes and tools, ritual objects from distant tribes or from neighbours closer to home - all became objects of fascination and interest to collectors.”<sup>70</sup>

The collections of Italian princes were characterised by an absence of specialisation and by the juxtaposition of natural and artificial objects. There was no didactic or scientific purpose in these collections. One of the largest and most important princely collections was the studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici in Florence, Italy. Created between 1569 and 1570 by Giorgio Vasari and scholars, Vincenzo Borghini and Giovanni Batista Adriani, the studiolo was a small, windowless room in the Palazzo Vecchio. The function of the room was as a simple repository for the collection. Resembling the interior of a precious cabinet, the doors of the cupboards were closed and the objects within were concealed from public view.

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<sup>70</sup> Oleg Neverov, 'His Majesty's Cabinet and Peter I's Kunstkammer' in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1985: 54.



**Fig. 6:** Interior view of the studiolo of Francesco I de' Medici in Florence, Italy, created between 1569 and 1570.

Most of the collections were housed in cabinets that made their first appearance in the sixteenth century. The names given to such collections, the Italian *Studiolo*, the French *Cabinet des Curiosités* and the German *Wunderkammer* or “chamber of wonders”, indicates something of the aura of mystery that enveloped the cabinets and their contents. Typically comprising a small, windowless room, the location of which in the palace was often secret, the walls of a studio housed cupboards and the objects they contained were arranged around a central point of inspection where occupancy was reserved solely for the prince.

The cabinets of curiosities of princes and statesmen were not only places of study but also served to communicate important political messages. The cabinets have been interpreted as spaces that represented the world in microcosm where the prince could symbolically claim dominion over the entire natural and artificial world. Julian Raby has suggested that the rationale of the cabinet of curiosities can be seen as an attempt to establish a microcosm intended to demonstrate, on the one hand, the



ingenuity of the Creator in the form of 'naturalia' and, on the other hand, man's creative ingenuity in the form of 'artificialia' and thus promoted the ideals of social order and civic responsibility.<sup>71</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has also referenced how the function of princely collections during the Renaissance was "to recreate the world in miniature around the central figure of the prince who thus claimed dominion over the world symbolically as he did in reality."<sup>72</sup> As Peter Vergo explains; "The very act of collecting has a political or ideological or aesthetic dimension which cannot be overlooked."<sup>73</sup> Most importantly, many of the objects brought back to Europe were incorporated into private collections where they were studied, catalogued and placed on display. The collections were an important precursor to the collections of the early public museums and their evolving systems of classification.

A second important aspect of the cabinet of curiosities was the method of displaying the objects. The cabinets as physical containers sometimes took the form of spacious closets or took over entire rooms. They were often constructed from fine woods, inlaid with lapis lazuli or decorated with jewels. The interiors were sectioned into shelves, drawers, partitions, niches and other receptacles.<sup>74</sup> Some enthusiasts concentrated on coins and medals, others on books and manuscripts and others on zoological and botanical specimens. One collection which had an enormous influence across Europe was that of Olaus Worm (1588-1654) which was particularly strong in archeological objects and contained a large number of fossils.

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<sup>71</sup> Julian Raby, 'Exotica from Islam' in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1985: 253.

<sup>72</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 2015: 64.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989: 2.

<sup>74</sup> As Impey and MacGregor point out, tremendous advances were made in the design of the lathe during the sixteenth century which allowed for the manufacture of specialised items in wood.



**Fig. 7:** The interior of Olaus Worm's museum in Copenhagen, From *Museum Wormianum*, 1654.

By the early years of the seventeenth century, illustrated catalogues of the collections were published and fashionable trips abroad were arranged for the sole purpose of journeying from one collection to another. Collections soon proliferated in incredible diversity ranging from antiquities, books, coins, manuscripts, medals, sea shells, minerals, fossils, zoological and botanical specimens, human and animal remains to mathematical and scientific instruments, watches and automata.<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to note the list of material collected by the milanese physician Lodovico Settala which, after his death, passed into the keeping of his son early in the 1630s. The collections were arranged in four rooms in the family house in Milan which eventually became the Settala Museum. The following groups of materials can be identified; Mathematical and physical / scientific instruments; Rocks and minerals; Zoological remains; Products of the vegetable kingdom; Ethnographic objects; Weapons; Archeological items; European craft items, Musical instruments; Books, prints and drawings; Paintings,

<sup>75</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16, Spring 1986: 22-27.

statues and medals.<sup>76</sup> The Kunstkammer of Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg (1640-88) in Berlin was notable in that it contained more than 4,900 items listing coins, gems, bronze figures and vessels, ceramics, glass and porcelain.<sup>77</sup>

The collections are notable due to the quantity, variety and rarity of their contents but also because of objects that represented the areas of technical, scientific, art and craft. Handcrafted objects comprising utensils, household items, weapons, art and coins and medals as well as natural objects which became identified with the universal museum type established in the nineteenth century. An increasing number of collectors across Europe began to cultivate cabinets devoted predominantly, or even exclusively, to one type of material. Collections focused on plants, minerals, fossils, shells and zoological specimens gave rise to a new type of museum; the natural history museum. Many collections were the forerunner of the scientific and technical museums, archaeology and ethnography museums, art museums, history museums and the decorative arts museum.

In Britain the collection of John Tradescant the elder (d. 1638) at Lambeth was the precursor of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. There were over 100,000 specimens in the collection of Sir Hans Sloane (1660 - 1753) President of the Royal Society and Royal College of Physicians which came to form the foundation of the British Museum. Founded in 1753, it was initially set up as a repository for three collections; the manuscript collection of the Cotton family; the manuscript library assembled by the Earls of Oxford and the collection of Sir Hans Sloane, a natural history collection with a small number of antique sculptures and stone

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<sup>76</sup> Antonio Aimi, Vincenzo de Michele and Alessandro Morandotti, 'Towards a History of Collecting in Milan in the Late Renaissance and Baroque Periods' in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1985: 25.

<sup>77</sup> Christian Theuerkauf, 'The Brandenburg Kunstkammer in Berlin' in Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of the Museum: The Cabinet of Curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1985: 110.

inscriptions.<sup>78</sup>

The notion that the museum was primarily for the general visitor's benefit remained an alien concept for quite some time as few collections were accessible to the wider public. The rare and exceptional objects in the cabinet of curiosities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries validated the collector and reinforced his dominion over nature and his fellow man. As Bennett has identified, their design and content reflected their role as a storehouse of a knowledge that was rare and exclusive, intelligible only to those with the time, inclination and cultural training to be able to decipher the relationship in which each object stands to the whole.<sup>79</sup>

Most modern public museums contain a nucleus of objects from the cabinets of curiosities. In 1584 the collection of Francesco I de' Medici was transferred into the new and more public context of the newly opened Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Rare and precious objects once destined for the private contemplation of the prince alone were now on view to all. The dispersal of these collections and their reconstitution in public museums placed objects in less enclosed spaces and enabled wider access. From being museums of everything and for the limited few, museums were becoming accessible to a larger section of the public.

## **1.2 International Exhibitions**

The design museum also derived its impetus from a series of exhibitions of culture and industry that became popular in the nineteenth century. The public display of objects deemed to be examples of 'good taste' has its origins in nineteenth century commercial trade fairs. Between 1880 and 1920 expositions became a regular feature of the European and American social landscape. Like museums, they professed an explicitly educational function; their exhibits followed a similar hierarchy of classification, their

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<sup>78</sup> Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, London: One-Off Press, 2000: 17.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995: 40.

buildings reflected the neoclassical styles of museum architecture and the objects they displayed represented the best in quality. Unlike museums, the expositions made no effort to mask their entertainment function, the sheer novelty and technical wizardry of their exhibits boldly mixed pleasure with serious instruction and visitors flocked to them.

A series of international exhibitions, or world's fairs, were devoted largely to the display of industrial objects, machinery and processes. Each country celebrated its industrial strength by displaying alongside other industrial nations products and scientific and technological achievements that were seen to be material signifiers of progress. The exhibitions also demonstrated an ability to attract and entertain a mass urban public on a large scale. Fifteen million visitors attended the Paris exposition of 1887. The Eiffel Tower was built for the exposition of 1889 and represented an astonishing achievement of modern design and engineering.

Scholarship on international exhibitions and world's fairs comprises a rich and varied field of research which has focused on their social and cultural significance.<sup>80</sup> Exhibitions stimulated the development of public museums, often supplying them with their buildings and initial collections. The Great Exhibition of 1851 provided the impetus for the development of London's South Kensington Museum complex and set an example that was repeated elsewhere. Chicago's great public museums emerged from the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. The exhibitions encouraged new ways of looking at the world and also created new forms of consumption.

In this respect the design museum connects to the new spaces of modernity that developed during the nineteenth century. They are many and varied and include shopping arcades, railway stations, conservatories, market halls and department stores. As Tim Barringer has noted:-

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<sup>80</sup> Scholarship includes; David Raizman and Ethan Robey (eds.), *Expanding Nationalisms at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915*, London: Routledge, 2017; Robert W. Rydell, *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993; Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

“The museum was redolent of the modernity of international exhibitions, the department store, liberal economics, technical design education and utilitarian reform ideology [as well as] the more traditional curatorial and aesthetic motivations.”<sup>81</sup>

A number of characteristics set the international exhibition and modern fair apart as a distinctive grouping. Paul Greenhalgh, Director of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and Professor of Art and Museum Studies at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, has described them as part of a “serial exhibition phenomenon” which were to have an impact on the future structure and policies of museums including the design museum. The exclusive emphasis on commercial and industrial subjects marked a decisive step away from the notion of the exhibition as a mass entertainment event and towards that of specialist educator and informant. They established an educational pattern; objects were displayed, people explained and worked them and the masses thronged to listen.<sup>82</sup>

Greenhalgh has shown how the activities of the contemporary museum can be compared to policies formulated by the creators of the international exhibitions who needed to win sponsorship and fill the site with people, which they did through policies such as introducing different days for different classes of visitors regulated by varying prices of admission.<sup>83</sup> Each of the exhibitions was involved in the practice of ‘showing and telling’, exhibiting industrial processes and goods to the public and promoting the themes of modernity and progress. They were also institutions that were open to all sections of the population and which pioneered ways to regulate the conduct of their visitors.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 brought together a range of disciplines and techniques of display that had been developed within earlier exhibiting

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<sup>81</sup> Tim Barringer, ‘Victorian Culture and the Museum: Before and After the White Cube’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, Volume 11, 2006: 133-145.

<sup>82</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, ‘Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions’, in Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989: 76.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*: 86.

platforms. In his study of the development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain, Martyn Walker explains that The Great Exhibition of 1851 had its antecedents in the modest provincial exhibitions organised by the Mechanics' Institutes some twenty years earlier.<sup>84</sup> An important way of publicising technical developments was through exhibitions held at Mechanics' Institutes from the late 1830s throughout the UK. The exhibitions were devoted largely to the display of industrial objects and processes and were intended to educate the public about new technical developments. The first large exhibition was held at the Lancashire and Cheshire Union Manchester Mechanics' Institute in 1837. Exhibits included model steam engines, models of useful machines and ingenious mechanical contrivances, models of public buildings, scientific instruments, coloured designs and drawings, specimens of painted and stained glass and insects. The regional exhibitions attracted tens of thousand of visitors and in 1849 the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute opened its exhibition to foreign competitors.

On 1 May 1851 *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* was opened by Queen Victoria. Housed in a temporary glass and steel structure constructed for the occasion in Hyde Park, the exhibition ran until 15 October 1851 and attracted over six million visitors. Contemporary accounts reveal that the event was considered to be an historic national achievement, not least for the sheer scale of the enterprise, the inclusion of every type and process of manufacture then known, the successful appeal to all classes of the population, the stimulation of trade and the educational benefit to the country and when the show was over, a solid profit of £186,000. Henry Cole later wrote:-

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<sup>84</sup> Martyn Walker, *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond: Supporting further education for the adult working classes*, London: Routledge, 2017.



“The history of the world I venture to say records no event comparable in its promotion of human industry, with that of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations in 1851. A great people invited all civilised nations to a festival to bring into comparison the works of human skill.”<sup>85</sup>



**Fig. 8:** Interior view of *The Great Exhibition*, Crystal Palace, London 1851.

A principal characteristic of The Great Exhibition, and one which has resonance for the development of the design museum, consisted of its arrangement of displays of manufacturing processes and products which were intended to raise the profile of new inventions and patents. It was an attempt to display the fruits of Britain's industrial revolution, its empire and its wealth, while also showcasing the manufactured goods produced by the rest of the world. The eastern half of the Crystal Palace was allocated to foreign countries and the western to Britain and the Empire. The space was divided into national sub-divisions and exhibits within them were divided according to the classifications of Raw Materials; Machinery; Manufactures: Textiles, Fabrics; Manufactures: Metallic, Vitreous and

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<sup>85</sup> Henry Cole as quoted in Victoria & Albert Museum, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Commemorative Album*, London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1950: 5.



Ceramic; Miscellaneous and Fine Arts.

Following the success of The Great Exhibition, Britain used its exhibition tradition to explore new ways to develop its economy. This is most visibly demonstrated when in 1887 the organisers of the new Earls Court complex took the decision to stage a series of international exhibitions focused on promoting the products of specific countries. The Indian and Colonial (1886), American (1887), Italian (1888), French (1890) and German (1891) exhibitions were unique in this regard. Each had the same categories including agriculture, mining and metallurgy, machinery, education and science and fine arts. They also had extensive committee structures, juries, prizes, thousands of private and public exhibitors and commanded audiences of at least two million.<sup>86</sup>

The exhibitions shared a number of commonalities; temporary facilities built on a sprawling site, products organised into national courts or display areas which subsequently developed into separate pavilions for each participating country, at least a third of the space given up to foreign products, a wide range of categories of product and a very vocal government participation all designed to promote a rhetoric of progress.

The European and American exhibition tradition unfolded alongside the British in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Exposition or 'Expo'<sup>87</sup> and the Worlds Fair were concerned with national identity but also

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<sup>86</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, 'Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions' in Peter Vergo (ed.), *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995: 77.

<sup>87</sup> In 1931 the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) was set up to provide a common organisational framework for the many Expos that had emerged as early as 1867. The BIE defines an Expo as a global event that aims at educating the public, sharing innovation, promoting progress and fostering co-operation. It is organised by a host country that invites other countries, companies, international organisations, the private sector, the civil society and the general public to participate. They are characterised by a diversity of participants, from top decision makers to children and provide the setting for exhibitions, diplomatic and business meetings, public debates and live shows. Available at: <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en/about-the-bie/our-history> (Accessed 20.10.17).

with mass entertainment and spectacle. Impressive buildings, gardens, towers, every type of modern technological wonder, large fine and decorative art shows, machine halls and pavilions, restaurants and cafes. The success of these events can be expressed in the numbers of visitors which were substantial. The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 was even larger than The Great Exhibition of 1851, attracting twenty-eight million visitors. Over twenty-seven million people attended the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago in 1893; Chicago's Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 attracted almost 49 million people. In Britain, over twenty-seven million people attended the Empire Exhibition in Wembley in 1924 and twelve million people visited the Glasgow Empire Exhibition of 1938.<sup>88</sup>



**Fig. 9:** The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889.

The underlying rhetoric of the international exhibition form was one of industrial and political progress. The earlier exhibitions from 1851 through

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<sup>88</sup> John MacKenzie, 'Propaganda and Empire - The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960', Manchester University Press, 1984: 101.

to the middle of the twentieth century were strongly influenced by the industrial revolution and the colonial ambitions of the time. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 the value of an object, whether as raw material, instrument of production or finished product, whether from Britain, India, France or America, were displayed as representative of a stage within an evolutionary process. Pavilions were constructed in which countries could showcase their material progress and trade pre-eminence based on technological innovation. The exhibitions were seen to represent progress and provided an opportunity for cultural and commercial exchange. Philosopher and cultural critic, Walter Benjamin has described world exhibitions as “places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish”.<sup>89</sup> In his view, a defining characteristic was a glorification of the exchange value of the commodity. They constructed a universe of a new and exclusive category of goods which he described as the “spécialité”. The exhibitions directly pointed towards the future, unlike the content of the eighteenth century cabinet of curiosities which was very firmly rooted in the past.

The policies behind the first design museums can be seen to share similarities with the key characteristics of the international exhibition. They served a role in educating the public, sharing innovation, promoted progress and enabled dialogue and shared experience. They were a unique way to reach out to a broad audience and a place where influencers, experts, politicians and the general public came together. For the organisers, the international exhibition was an important promotional tool for nation branding with its ability to attract world leaders and decision makers as well as millions of visitors. For the visiting public, the exhibition was an experience that combined education and entertainment and offered a wide variety of exhibitions showcasing innovative products and groundbreaking technologies, activities and shows. Participants are given an exhibition space or the opportunity to build a pavilion (exhibition space). In these designed spaces they are able

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<sup>89</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999: 17. The full text of Benjamin's unfinished work, written between 1927 and 1940, was first published by Harvard University Press in 1999.

to showcase their achievements, experience, products, innovations and ideas in relation to a specific theme and present to an international audience (displaying industrial objects). During the exhibition conferences, workshops, debates as well as diplomatic and professional meetings are organised and take place providing a platform for the exchange of ideas (education) and the establishment of new partnerships (sponsorship). The exhibitions were also popular for their exuberance and their entertainment value. Greenhalgh has observed that as an exemplar, the international exhibition “did show that it was possible to have high and popular culture in close proximity, and even that the one was capable of becoming the other.”<sup>90</sup> The exhibitions fused elements of high cultural standing such as the fine and decorative arts, displays of science and technology, anthropology and geography with trade fair stands and an amusement park. The exhibitions introduced entertainment zones. Rides such as the ‘Wiggle-wobble’, ‘Flip-flap’ and ‘Witching-waves’ were apparently popular amusement attractions.<sup>91</sup> The exhibition hall quickly became an essential part of the modern city, as a form that was put to work in a range of different contexts, from the convention centre to the department store. As Deyan Sudjic, Director of the Design Museum, London, has noted, “the expo itself evolved into a curious mixture of nationalism, utopian futures and fairground entertainment.”<sup>92</sup>

In later years the international exhibition did much to open up the discussion of design to an expanded international audience and helped to map, label and define the unfamiliar territories of design, style and taste during a period of intense interest in such topics. In 1923 the first International Exhibition of Decorative Arts was held in Monza, Italy. It moved to Milan in 1933 and became the Triennale di Milano, an exhibition held every three years, to promote an international dialogue about design.

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, ‘Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions’ in Peter Vergo (ed.), *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London: Routledge, 1995: 98.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.: 85.

<sup>92</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *B is for Bauhaus*, London: Penguin Books, 2014: 173.

Staged at the Palazzo dell'Arte, it hosted exhibitions and events showcasing the very latest examples of contemporary design. The first three editions were primarily dedicated to graphic arts, ceramics and to decorative arts in general, while the fourth edition, the "International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts" focused on architecture.<sup>93</sup> In his autobiography Terence Conran, founder of London's Design Museum, cites the Triennale exhibitions in Milan during the 1950s as a crucially important platform where he was able to see at first hand the best of contemporary Italian and international design, at a time when Italian designers were dominant.<sup>94</sup>

The establishment of the V&A, London marked a significant turning point in the development of British museum policy and a shift in the state's attitude towards museums. The V&A emerged from the profits generated by The Great Exhibition of 1851. Initially known as the Museum of Manufactures, it opened in May 1852 at Marlborough House with a nucleus of objects covering applied arts and science purchased from The Great Exhibition. In September 1852 the collection transferred to Somerset House. By February 1854 discussions were underway to transfer the museum to its current site and in 1857, it opened as the South Kensington Museum.<sup>95</sup> It clearly enunciated the principles of the modern museum conceived as an instrument of public education and an exhibition of good taste, from which both taste and technique could be learnt. Henry Cole, the first director of the museum and an ardent advocate of the role museums should play in the formation of a rational public culture, wrote:-

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<sup>93</sup> La Triennale de Milano website. Available at: <http://www.triennale.org/en/chi-siamo/storia-e-mission/> (Accessed 25.04.17).

<sup>94</sup> Terence Conran, *My Life in Design*, Conran Octopus, 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Anthony Burton, Anthony, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*: London, V&A Publications, 1999.

“The Museum is intended to be used, and to the utmost extent consistent with the preservation of the articles; and not only used physically, but to be taken about and lectured upon. For my own part, I venture to think that unless museums and galleries are made subservient to purposes of education, they dwindle into very sleepy and useless institutions.”<sup>96</sup>

Administered eventually under the auspices of the Board of Education, the museum was officially dedicated to the service of an extended and undifferentiated public with opening hours and an admissions policy designed to maximise its accessibility to the working classes.<sup>97</sup> It proved remarkably successful attracting over fifteen million visits between 1857 and 1883, over six million of which were recorded in the evenings, the most popular time for working class visitors.

The establishment of the V&A has relevance to the subsequent development of the design museum as it served to reinforce the idea that objects can, and should be, divorced from their original context of ownership and redisplayed in a different context of meaning. In addition, the museum provided a safe and neutral environment in which to display and mediate objects. The V&A was intended as an instructive demonstration to students and manufacturers of what design could achieve. The developing role of the design curator is most visibly seen in the history of the V&A. Here the curator’s function was understood to be in the service of a collection. The curator brought to a public or private collection a recognised skill-set around specialist subject expertise such as furniture, glass or ceramics.

### **1.3 The Decorative Arts Museum and the Modern Art Museum**

Another important precursor to the design museum was the modern art museum and the decorative arts museum in the twentieth century. Alice Rawsthorn, a design critic and former director of London’s Design

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<sup>96</sup> Henry Cole, Report to the Department of Practical Art, 1854 in Peter Vergo (ed.), *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989: 8.

<sup>97</sup> Anthony Burton, Anthony, *Vision & Accident: The Story of the Victoria and Albert Museum*: London, V&A Publications, 1999.

Museum, has explained how historically objects found their way into museums through two distinct museological avenues. The first approach involved decorative arts museums that focused on furniture, ceramics and fashion, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), and which inspired the first iteration of what is now the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna, which opened in 1864. Emerging in the twentieth century, a second approach saw museums of modern and contemporary art take a keen interest in industrial design. In this respect, the pioneering institution was the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, where the world's first curatorial department devoted to architecture and design was established in 1932.<sup>98</sup>

A number of influential museum directors pioneered new methods of displaying objects that borrowed from the contemporary art museums of the time. Writing in 1910, John Cotton Dana, the pioneering founder and first director of the Newark Museum in New Jersey, observed:-

“Ancient conventions have museums firmly in hand; ...most museums tend to become storehouses, used more to please and educate curators than to entertain and instruct the public; that they are quite averse to change; and that few among them exercise an influence on their respective communities at all commensurate with the cost of founding and maintenance.”<sup>99</sup>

Dana advocated the museum as an alive and active institution offering entertainment, enlightenment and education. In a series of short pamphlets published between 1917 and 1920, he conceptualised the new museum, promoting them as instruments for popular education and recreation; “a good museum attracts, entertains, arouses curiosity, leads to questions - and thus promotes learning.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Alice Rawsthorn, *Hello World: Where Design Meets Life*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013: 36-37.

<sup>99</sup> John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, edited by W.A. Peniston, Washington DC: The Newark Museum Association, New Jersey & The American Association of Museums, 1999: 157.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*: 65.

Dana hesitated calling the Newark a 'museum' preferring instead to describe the ideal museum environment as being "an open workshop of delight and learning" and an "institute of visual instruction."<sup>101</sup> His many special exhibitions stretched the boundaries of conventional display by featuring applied and industrial arts, textile and clay products manufactured by local firms, immigrant's handicrafts and "inexpensive articles of good design." Dana hoped that these exhibits would draw new visitors like housewives, workers, immigrants and others who might have a natural interest in the objects on display. More important to Dana than what was displayed, was how objects were used. He established new practices such as loaning objects to school classrooms, shops and hospitals; creating a teacher-training course at local colleges; opening a junior museum only for children and establishing branch museums in local libraries.<sup>102</sup>

Similar curatorial practices were introduced by Alfred H. Barr at MoMA in New York during his tenure as Director in the 1930s. Curator Philip Johnson's 1934 exhibition, *Machine Art* at MoMA elevated design to the level of art by investing the object with an almost auratic status. In the exhibition, everyday machine-made objects such as airplane propeller blades, ball bearings, coils, springs, laboratory flasks and a ball bearing were placed on cedar and walnut pedestals like pieces of sculpture, or under glass cases and displayed in front of walls covered in oil cloth, stainless steel, aluminium and natural Belgian linen. A humble tupperware container was elevated to the status of a modernist icon by putting it on a pedestal and emphasising the simplicity of its form. A single ball bearing was appreciated for its sculptural quality. This display technique ensured that the objects were highlighted as works of art and communicated as exemplars of modern design to be admired as much for their formal

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<sup>101</sup> John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, edited by W.A. Peniston, Washington DC: The Newark Museum Association, New Jersey & The American Association of Museums, 1999: 65.

<sup>102</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997: 61.



beauty as for their functionality.<sup>103</sup> The display strategy deliberately divorced the object from its everyday, utilitarian context, separating it from its social function and meanings and enabled the object to be seen and understood afresh.<sup>104</sup>

Visitors were invited to vote for their favourite exhibits and the exhibition catalogue included a price list and manufacturer's contact information encouraging visitors to purchase the objects for display in their own homes. A selection of the objects from the exhibition would later form the foundation of the design collection at MoMA. The innovative display strategy adopted by the curators of the *Machine Art* exhibition would also influence the way in which objects were presented in the newly established design museums.



**Fig. 10:** *Machine Art* at MoMA, New York, 1934. Curated by Philip Johnson.

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<sup>103</sup> Zoë Ryan (ed.) *As Seen: Exhibitions that made Architecture and Design History*, The Art Institute of Chicago, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017: 18.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*: 18.

From the late 1980s, in response to a series of rapid political, social and cultural changes, museums become more aware of their audiences and entered a seemingly feverish dynamic attempting to make their venues more attractive, their exhibitions more didactic and their names more appealing.<sup>105</sup> During the 1990s there is a noticeable shift in focus as design museums attempt to redefine themselves by changing their names and shifting the focus of their acquisition policies. Research by Javier Gimeno-Martinez and Jasmijn Verlinden has documented the impact of this shift.<sup>106</sup> In 1995 the Museum voor Sierkunst (Museum of Decorative Arts) in Ghent changed its name to Museum voor Sierkunst en Vormgeving (Museum of Decorative Arts and Design). In 2001 the institution's name underwent a further change and became the Design Museum Gent. For trustees at the the Design Museum, Ghent, design reflected a wider concept of which decorative arts formed only a part. The term decorative arts was seen to be archaic and did not reflect the museum's acquisition and exhibition policies. In 2002 the Taideteollismuseo (Museum of Applied Arts) in Helsinki, Finland changed its name to Designmuseum (Design Museum). In the same year New York's American Craft Museum changed its name to the Museum of Arts and Design.

Gimeno-Martinez and Verlinden argue that the name changes addressed two key concerns. Firstly, that museum directors wanted to raise the institution's profile and secondly, that they wanted to gain international status and, because of a rising public interest in design, felt that the word 'design' helped them to achieve both of these aims, a factor that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.<sup>107</sup> Veteran institutions with decorative art collections, like the V&A in London and the Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York, began to call themselves

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<sup>105</sup> Eileen Hooper-Greenhill has charted this shift in museums in a series of studies including: *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994 and *The Educational Role of the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1999.

<sup>106</sup> Javier Gimeno-Martinez and Jasmijn Verlinden, 'From Museum of Decorative Arts to Design Museum: The Case of the Design Museum Gent', *Design and Culture*, Volume 2, Issue 3, 2010: 259-283.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*: 272.

national museums of art and design, the V&A name change becoming effective in January 2002. The association with the field of design clearly had connotations as something modern, global and progressive.

Alongside a new focus on design within these institutions, the role of the curator was undergoing key changes. Curators continued to research and care for the collection and to acquire historical, and contemporary, objects but there was an element of the job that was steadily growing in importance and that was the production of exhibitions. It was the expansion of this role that was to have a direct impact on contemporary curatorial practice.

#### **1.4 A Rising Public Interest in Design**

From the 1960s, the antiques trade, auctions and retail influenced a growing consumer demand for design. In London and across Europe, retailers and gallerists established spaces in which to promote the work of contemporary designers. This influenced the establishment of private collections that focused on contemporary design. Since the mid-twentieth century, furniture companies such as Vitra and Herman Miller had produced and sold reproductions of design pieces. Working with designers such as George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames, Herman Miller produced pieces that would become popular examples of industrial design and which would later enter the collections of design museums. In 1989 Vitra opened a museum on its campus in Weil am Rhein to collect and exhibit the work of twentieth century architects and designers. The collection was established by Rolf Fehlbaum, the museum's founder and former Chairman of Vitra. In the 1980s he assembled a collection of furniture that was transferred to the Vitra Design Museum when it opened in 1989. The collection has gradually been expanded by the museum's directors, Alexander von Vegesack (1989 - 2010), Mateo Kries and Marc Zehntner (since 2011) and it now numbers among the largest of its kind worldwide. Originally a private collection, it became part of an

institutional framework with the founding of the museum.<sup>108</sup> The collection now comprises 7,000 pieces of furniture, more than 1,000 lighting objects and numerous archives, including the estates of designers Charles and Ray Eames, Verner Panton and Alexander Girard.

A further factor in a rising consumer demand for design was a developing antiques trade in London. During the 1960s in London, a group of gallerists undertook research on obscure and sometimes long-forgotten designers, invested in emerging ones and produced the kind of scholarship and monographs that had traditionally been the exclusive domain of art galleries. In 1966 John Jesse set up a stall in Portobello Market specialising in Art Nouveau and Art Deco. Two years later he opened a gallery on Kensington Church Street and established himself as a leading dealer of Twentieth Century Decorative Arts, sourcing works for collectors and museums worldwide. During this time London were producing some of the earliest champions of contemporary design, among them Themes & Variations which opened in Notting Hill in 1984, and David Gill who launched his art and design gallery on Fulham Road three years later. These were bold moves at a time when furniture and decorative antiques were very much the prevailing taste.<sup>109</sup>

Gill initially focused his collection on early modern masters such as Jean-Michel Frank, Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann and Eileen Gray. From the early 1990s he started to represent artists and designers who represented the vanguard, such as Donald Judd, Grayson Perry and Garouste & Bonetti, later saying, “I wanted to take people on a journey between historical pieces and contemporary design.”<sup>110</sup> Connoisseurs and

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Susanne Graner, Head of Collections, Vitra Design Museum, 19.05.2016. Available at: <https://www.vitra.com/en-us/magazine/details/susanne-graner> (Accessed 3.08.17).

<sup>109</sup> ‘Kensington Church Street bids farewell to John Jesse’, *Antiques Trade Gazette*, 12 July 2005. Available at: <https://www.antiquetrade gazette.com/news/2005/kensington-church-street-bids-farewell-to-john-jesse/> (Accessed 20.10.17).

<sup>110</sup> Marisa Bartolucci, ‘The Ultimate Guide to Collecting Contemporary Design’, *Introspective* magazine, 15 February 2016. Available at: <https://www.1stdibs.com/introspective-magazine/collecting-contemporary/> (Accessed 20.10.17).

collectors such as the banker Jacob Rothschild and the interior designer David Mlinaric became regular buyers. Later Gill shifted the gallery's focus to contemporary designers such as Zaha Hadid, the Campana Brothers and Fredrikson Stallard.

The early 2000s saw the opening of a number of independently curated spaces for design that exhibited the work of contemporary designers at the start of their careers. The Aram Gallery was established in 2002 by curator Daniel Charny and Aram Store founder, Zeev Aram. Located on the third floor of the Aram Store in Covent Garden, the opening exhibition, *Small Step* (25 October - 18 December 2002) presented the experimental works and ideas of ten design graduates across a range of disciplines. The gallery was interested to show how designer's explorations, ideas and uses of new materials translated into new typologies. The Aram Gallery has since built up a strong profile presenting the work of established and emerging designers who are selected because of their experimental design thinking. The gallery stages five new shows every year addressing relevant topics within contemporary design. The diverse programme of exhibitions include solo and group shows, with a thematic, material or process-led focus.<sup>111</sup>

The gallery's location above the Aram store selling contemporary design connects its cultural and commercial activities. This model resonates with the furniture company Vitra that established a design museum in Weil am Rhein in 1989 and the Design Museum, London which was established by the retailer and founder of *Habitat*, Terence Conran, also in 1989. The approach also connects to an earlier history of the display of designed objects at international exhibitions discussed earlier in this chapter. The close link between commerce and culture is something which directly influenced the origins of the Design Museum, London and which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

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<sup>111</sup> Aram Gallery website. Available at: <https://www.thearamgallery.org> (Accessed 20.05.17).

The establishment of commercial galleries in London promoting the work of contemporary designers influenced the establishment of private collections of contemporary design. In 2006 Julien Lombail and Loic Le Gaillard opened a space in Chelsea in a former carpenter's workshop. The Carpenters Workshop Gallery represents international artists and designers who work "outside their traditional territories of expression." The gallery is actively involved in the research and production of limited edition pieces. In 2008 the gallery opened a second space in Mayfair and in 2015 a workshop in Roissy, France. The gallery became the first to integrate a production facility dedicated to research and the development of collectable design.<sup>112</sup>

FUMI was established in 2008 by Sam Pratt and Valerio Capo. The gallery focuses on "the promotion, commission and sale of high-level craft, with an emphasis on the conceptual and practical."<sup>113</sup> It has established a series of long-term relationships with a core group of represented designers. Objects are usually hand made by the designer in a small workshop context, or in small batch production by specialist crafts practitioners. Many use traditional techniques such as carving, glassblowing, cabinetry and lacquering while others disassemble or apply digital technologies in their making. The gallery has built creative relationships with institutions, interior designers and collectors and runs an ambitious programme of exhibitions alongside a presence at international design fairs.

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<sup>112</sup> Carpenters Workshop Gallery website. Available at: <http://carpentersworkshop-gallery.com> (Accessed 20.05.17).

<sup>113</sup> Presentation by FUMI Director, Sam Pratt to MA Curating Contemporary Design students, the Design Museum, 4 October 2017.



**Fig. 11:** Gallery Fumi's showroom in Mayfair, London, 2017.

Over time, the growing client bases of commercial design galleries attracted the interest of auction houses, who began to establish twentieth century and contemporary design departments. Alexander Payne joined Phillips in 1999 with the aim of building a new international design department. Having previously headed a small design department at Bonhams in London, he moved to Phillips where he began to develop their design market, initially in America, then in the UK and internationally. In an interview Payne revealed:-

“...there’s a broader approach to collecting design, and no specific area has been ghettoed, as such. But I think that’s what’s really exciting - the fact that there’s not a narrow approach to collecting, and now there’s a renaissance in understanding where design and decorative arts have come from. What’s happening is collectors, perhaps from the modernist era of the 1920s and 1930s, are seeing how they can potentially connect the likes of Newson, Laarman and Hadid to their collections, their homes, or other areas of their lives.”<sup>114</sup>

The field of collectible design has existed under different names and in

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<sup>114</sup> Alex Easthope, ‘An introduction to collecting design with Phillip’s Alexander Payne’, *Classic Driver*, 14 April 2017. Available at: <https://www.classicdriver.com/en/article/design-furniture/introduction-collecting-design-phillips-alexander-payne> (Accessed 20.05.17).

different guises, as art furniture, functional art, design art, experimental design and, most recently, fine design. Edwin Heathcote has written about this changing landscape for commercial design when he points out that twenty years ago design was called the “applied arts”. The auction houses periodically held sales of classic and contemporary design pieces but they were few and far between. Pieces by celebrated designers such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Eileen Gray sold for just a few thousand pounds, as Heathcote comments:-

“Then, in the noughties, something happened. Designers, seeing the vast sums to be made in the contemporary art sales, decided they would become artists. Rather than designing to commission or for manufacture, as they had traditionally done, they began to create one-off pieces, to launch “editions”, borrowing the tropes and language of the art market.”<sup>115</sup>

In June 2005, Christie’s sold a 1948 Carlo Mollino trestle desk, owned by contemporary art collector Dakis Joannou, for an unprecedented \$3.9 million, much more than the estimate of \$200,000. The sale represented a significant shift when compared with the previous auction record for twentieth century design of \$1.9 million reached in 2000 for a 1929 chromed-metal and lacquer desk by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann. The Mollino desk was purchased by Cristina Grajales, one of New York’s leading gallerists in modern and contemporary design, for a client who was keen on creating an important mid-century design collection. Design was seen to be a marketable and a commercial asset. The hybrid came to be known as ‘design art’ and resulted in works reaching stratospheric, art world prices, famously culminating in Marc Newson’s Lockheed Lounge which sold at Philips de Pury for £1.1 million in 2009.<sup>116</sup> In the same year a Dragon armchair by Eileen Gray from the collection of Yves Saint Laurent sold for €21.9 million at a sale at Christie’s in Paris. As a result, designers were feted across the world in magazines, festivals, fairs and galleries. It

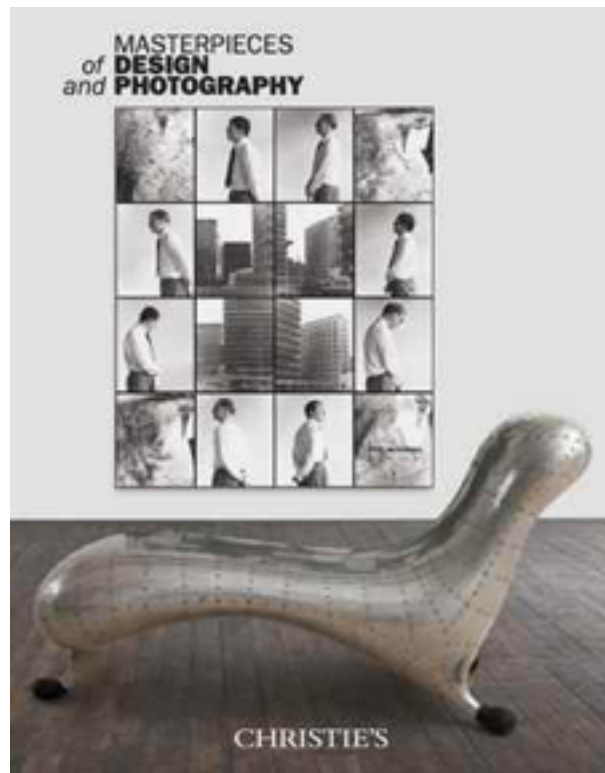
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<sup>115</sup> Edwin Heathcote, ‘Collecting Design: Designs on the market’, *Financial Times*, 27 May 2011. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content> (Accessed 20.05.17).

<sup>116</sup> Marcus Fairs, ‘Newson chair sells for design-art record 1.1 million record’, *Dezeen*, 30 April 2009. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2009/04/30/newson-chair-sells-for-design-art-record-11-million-pounds/> (Accessed 20.05.17).



seemed that design now had a market with auction prices comparable to the art market.



**Fig. 12:** Cover of Christie's auction catalogue featuring Marc Newson's *Lockheed Lounge*, 2009.

The art market has been extensively studied with artists' values widely published and discussed.<sup>117</sup> But there has been a distinct lack of data about the design market and understanding conventional markers for the market values of design pieces. In 2005 Rabih Hage, a gallerist, designer and founder of online design think-tank DeTnk, commissioned and published a report which set out to quantify the sales of contemporary design by designers.<sup>118</sup> DeTnk describes itself as an online think tank dedicated to everything relating to modern contemporary design, architecture and

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<sup>117</sup> Academic literature includes; Natasha Degen, *The Market (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2013; Peter Watson, *From Manet to Manhattan: The Rise of the Modern Art Market*, London: Random House, 1992. *The Art Newspaper*, an online and print publication, was founded in 1990 by Umberto Allemandi and Anna Somers Cocks and publishes reviews and in-depth commentary on the international art market.

<sup>118</sup> 'DeTnk, A New Way of collecting design and architecture'. Available at: <https://www.detnk.com/aboutus> (Accessed 20.05.17).

interiors. It is a design marketplace for the trade and acquisition of quality design, an online curated space showcasing the work of up and coming and established designers and a platform dedicated to providing the latest and most interesting news, articles and discussions on contemporary design. The platform, aimed at design enthusiasts and collectors, was intended to bring a fresh perspective to the contemporary conversation on design while expanding the margins of design discourse and debate into a public forum. *The DeTnk market report, The Rise of the Collectible Design Market 2005-11* set out to analyse design sales and provide a holistic analysis of the emerging collectible design market. In an interview, Hage explained why he had embarked on the report:-

“We were all talking about the rise in the design market, but wondering, was there really a rise? Was there really a design market? We started looking at the market...collecting data and observing the sales and changes and over the years the market has proved not only to exist but to be solid. It seems it is here to stay.”<sup>119</sup>

The 2016 report focuses on sales from five of the largest auction houses including Christie’s (New York, Paris, London); Sotheby’s (New York, Paris, London) and Phillips (New York, London). It confirmed that the global collectible design market had steadily grown with 25.3% more lots offered for sale and a 36.35% increase in total value of sales in 2016. The research undertaken by DeTnk also shows that design is still a relatively fledgling market. Jean Prouvé sold for less than £2 million at auction, a small sum compared with some of the big names in art with a single Picasso selling for as much as £65.5 million.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, the research does indicate that design is being taken as seriously as art and that contemporary design promoted by the commercial gallery and the auction house, plays an important part in driving and sustaining a commercial market for contemporary design.

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<sup>119</sup> Edwin Heathcote, ‘Collecting Design: Designs on the market’, *Financial Times*, 27 May 2011. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content> (Accessed 20.05.17).

<sup>120</sup> 2017 DeTnk Collectible Design Market Report: An Analysis of Design Sales During 2016. Available from DeTnk.

The expanding market for collectible contemporary design has also benefitted museums and their collections. Aware of the importance of institutional recognition in validating and promoting the careers of designers, gallerists and collectors have either donated or sold prototypes and finished works by its young designers to museum collections.

A government focus on the creative industries during the 1990s, enabled by funding from new sources such as the National Lottery, resulted in a proliferation of exhibitions, trade shows and travelling showcases of contemporary British design. Government-funded organisations such as the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), the Design Council and the British Council initiated a number of projects to promote British design across the UK and overseas, much like the international exhibitions during the nineteenth century. The DTI were particularly active during the 1990s arranging a series of trade promotion initiatives and exhibitions to promote British design overseas. Design was also promoted regionally across the UK, notably through city specific design festivals such as the Glasgow UK City of Architecture and Design in 1999. The festival was directed by Deyan Sudjic, a former editor of the design magazine, *Blueprint*, and now Director of the Design Museum, London. Design was also a key focus in the controversial Millennium Experience which opened to the public at Greenwich in 2000.

In 1996 Emily Campbell was appointed the first Head of Design and Architecture at the British Council, the UK's international organisation for cultural relations. In an interview, she described her role as a "design ambassador" promoting British design around the world and raising awareness of design issues. During her tenure, the British Council introduced the International Young Design Entrepreneur Award and were commissioners and curators of exhibitions and design showcases at a range of venues including the Venice Biennale.<sup>121</sup> The exhibitions and publications produced by the British Council provide well-documented

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<sup>121</sup> Kristina Gill, 'Interview with Head of Design of British Council Emily Campbell', *Three Layer Cake*, 10.12.17. Available at: <http://www.yankodesign.com/2007/10/12/interview-with-head-of-design-of-british-council-emily-campbell/> (Accessed 15.01.18).

surveys of the culture and industry of design during the 1990s and 2000s. From 2011 to 2014, a series of papers were published by the Architecture, Design, Fashion department. The ADF papers invited critics and curators to explore new directions in British architecture, design and fashion through specific themes or a series of case studies. Subjects included design collectives, fashion as installation, sustainability in design, 3D printing and social design and the papers did much to bring attention to the current and emerging debates in contemporary design.<sup>122</sup> Campbell went on to become Head of Design at the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) where she continued to focus attention on the promotion and debate of design and its emergent issues.

### **1.5 The Growing Popularity of Design Exhibitions**

From the 1980s, exhibitions were seen by museums as a major way to generate external income, build the museum's brand and attract larger visitor numbers. The growing demand for contemporary exhibition programming started to offer new opportunities to curators that were independent of collection responsibilities. It was the expansion of this role that was to lead to wide-ranging changes in contemporary curatorial practice. It also suggested new roles for the design curator, in curating exhibitions and displays that communicated what was happening in contemporary culture but also in bringing new thinking to the museum's collections.

The years leading up to the millennium saw the creation of a number of large-scale design exhibitions that presented intriguing and innovative concepts in engaging ways. Curators started to experiment with new formats and new approaches. Significantly the exhibitions were curated by individuals or agencies operating outside the institutional context of the museum and who were described by *Design Week* in 2001 as "a new

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<sup>122</sup> ADF Papers, published by the British Council's Architecture, Design, Fashion department, were launched on 28 July 2011. Available at: <https://design.britishcouncil.org/blog/2011/jul/28/launch-adf-papers/> (Accessed 25.10.18).

breed of curators.”<sup>123</sup> Restructure was established in 1999 by Libby Sellers and Helen Evenden, graduates of the MA Design History programme at the Royal College of Art, run jointly with the V&A. The curatorial agency provided design and architecture-related content for a variety of clients and institutions including RIBA, Habitat, L’Oreal, Wordsearch and the Design Council. As part of a month long design festival, UKinNY, Restructure were commissioned by the Design Council to curate a major touring exhibition, *Great Expectations: New British Design Stories* to be installed in New York’s Grand Central Terminal, Vanderbilt Hall.

The exhibition featured over one hundred examples of “ground-breaking British design” that included an ultra-chic dog house, fashion that travelled as an air-mail envelope, an aluminium bicycle that glowed in the dark and a self chilling drink can. Acclaimed design team Casson Mann were responsible for designing the installation and sought to create one single structure that would fill the space, but which would also create a setting for dialogue. Taking their inspiration from the banquet scene in Charles Dickens’ classic novel, *Great Expectations*, the exhibition presented examples of design excellence laid out on a vast glowing table. The exhibition invited visitors to take a seat and, through speakers and screens set into the chairs and table, learn more about the ideas that inspired the creations and the processes behind the objects on display. Graphics were integrated by placing text-like speech bubbles relating to nearby objects. Theatre lights were installed around the edge of the exhibition space to flood colour across the marble walls and into the huge windows to announce to 42nd street that something exciting was happening within the station building. The exhibition subsequently toured to the Far East, Australia and North America and won a number of awards.

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<sup>123</sup> ‘Structure this’, *Design Week*, 2 August 2001. Available at: <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/2-august-2001/structure-this/> (Accessed 15.01.18).



**Fig. 13:** *Great Expectations* installed at New York's Grand Central Station, 1999. Curated by Restructure, Exhibition design: Casson Mann.

The exhibition was notable for its innovative curatorial and design approach but also for the future career trajectory of its curators, Libby Sellers and Helen Evenden. In 2001 Sellers joined the Design Museum as a curator and went on to curate exhibitions on designers Marc Newson, Peter Saville and a celebration of the life and work of Eileen Gray. She also oversaw the museum's annual *Designer of the Year* and *Design Mart* exhibitions. In 2007 she left the Design Museum to open her own gallery space in west London commissioning and selling the work of contemporary designers. Evenden went on to tutor in automotive design at the Royal College of Art before joining the Design Museum as Head of Education in 2003.

Since the millennium, the number, range and scale of design exhibitions has increased dramatically in the UK. Increasingly museums and venues that have traditionally presented exhibitions focusing on fine art or the decorative arts have started to realise the potential of the design exhibition to reach a wider audience and increasingly have brought design into their

programmes. Since the late 1990s, London venues such as the V&A, the Barbican and Somerset House have staged exhibitions that have attracted substantial audiences. In 1998 the first design exhibition entered the Barbican's exhibition programme. *The Art of the Harley* (22 January - 28 April 1998) featured over thirty customised Harley Davidson motorcycles. Other design exhibitions followed including *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* (21 October 2015 - 14 February 2016) and *Bauhaus: Art as Life* (3 May - 12 August 2012). Today the Barbican describes its visual arts programme as embracing art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film.<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, Somerset House promotes a programme of major exhibitions covering a broad contemporary remit including architecture, design, fashion, music and photography. Claire Catterall, Director of Exhibitions and, like Sellers and Evenden, a former graduate of the MA History of Design at the RCA, worked as an independent curator throughout the 1990s and was responsible for a number of high profile design exhibitions including *Powerhouse::UK: British Creativity Now* in Horse Guards Parade (1998); *Stealing Beauty: British Design Now* at the Institute of Contemporary Art (1999) and *Food: Design and Culture* for Glasgow 1999. In 2000 she co-founded Scarlet Projects with Sarah Gaventa, also a graduate of the RCA Design History programme. The agency established a reputation for innovative work that brought design and architecture to a wider public. They also pioneered a new approach to commissioning and curating installations, offering a strategy which saw exhibitions, installations and events in public spaces, commercial and business settings, as well as in museums and galleries. Clients were also wide ranging and included The British Council, The V&A, Science Museum, Wellcome Trust, Selfridges and Bloomberg, and their work extended from London to Berlin and Tokyo.

In 2012 Catterall was appointed Director of Exhibitions at Somerset

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<sup>124</sup> Barbican website. Available at: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/our-programme/visual-arts>. (Accessed 20.10.17).

House. Since taking up the role she has brought a distinctive programme of design exhibitions to the galleries, including: *SHOWstudio: Fashion Revolution* (17 September - 23 December 2009); *Maison Martin Margiela 20 the exhibition* (3 June - 5 September 2010); *Tim Walker Storyteller* (18 October 2012 - 27 January 2013); *Valentino: Master of Couture* (29 November 2012 - 3 March 2013); *Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore!* (20 November 2013 - 2 March 2014); *Big Bang Data* (3 December 2015 - 20 March 2016) and *Hair by Sam McKnight* (2 November 2016 - 12 March 2017). Catterall also devised and curated the venue's acclaimed annual contemporary graphic art fair, *Pick Me Up*.<sup>125</sup>

During the 2000s, the practice of design curating was starting to expand outside of the museum and gallery. It was extending to new sites of practice and became a key area of practice in the rapidly changing fields of contemporary science and health care. As Catherine McDermott has described, curators and directors at the Science Museum and the Wellcome Trust were commissioning curators, artists and designers to communicate the complexities of modern science and technology to the widest audience. Examples include the Wellcome Trust's ground-breaking exhibitions at Euston Road, ranging across the human heart, hygiene, and mental health. At the Science Museum, curated family sleepovers were introduced and the art collective Superflex's Cockroach Tour used performance art to explain climate change. In 1996, the first Maggie's Centre opened its groundbreaking support for cancer patients commissioning contemporary architects and designers to create an environment for high quality health care.<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps the most visible expression of a rising public interest in design and an awareness of design's increasing economic value was the establishment of the London Design Festival (LDF) in 2003. LDF was

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<sup>125</sup> Somerset House website. Available at: <https://www.somersethouse.org.uk>. (Accessed 20.10.17).

<sup>126</sup> Catherine McDermott, 'Curating Contemporary Design - 20 Years of Change', *The Design Journal*, Volume 20, 2017, Issue 3: 307 - 312.



conceived by Sir John Sorrell, former Chair of the Design Council and Ben Evans, a graduate of the MA History of Design at the RCA and formerly content editor for the exhibition spaces at the Millennium Dome in 2000. Their concept was to create an annual event that would promote the city's creativity, drawing in the country's greatest thinkers, practitioners, retailers and educators "to deliver an unmissable celebration of design". London Design Festival would celebrate and promote London as the design capital of the world. The launch of the first Festival took place at Bloomberg on 25 March 2003, with a huge show of support from design, education, government and business.<sup>127</sup>

A review of the early years of the Festival reveals a steady increase in scale and ambition. By 2004 the London Design Festival had doubled in size and in 2005 it had become part of London's cultural calendar with Gordon Brown praising it for "cradling the British genius." In 2006 the Festival was opened by Sir Terence Conran and attended by over 300,000 people. Whilst the V&A had always had a small involvement, from 2009 the V&A became the hub for the London Design Festival. Since then its involvement has grown with a programme of commissions and exhibitions that take place at the museum during the Festival. In 2007 LDF commissioned its first Landmark Project, the inaugural London Design Medal which was awarded to the architect Zaha Hadid. Distinct 'design districts' began to emerge where leading international brands, independent retailers, neighbourhood restaurants and cultural institutions joined forces "with a view to revitalising the heritage of the area as a place where people come together to share, enjoy and learn about design in its broadest sense; design, culture, fashion and food."<sup>128</sup> In 2018 there are nine design districts with the Festival commissioning high profile designers and architects, as well as emerging talents, to create installations in some of London's most prominent spaces, including the V&A and Trafalgar

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<sup>127</sup> London Design Festival website. Available at: <https://www.londondesignfestival.com/what-london-design-festival> (Accessed 20.10.18).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.: Available at <https://www.londondesignfestival.com/design-districts> (Accessed 20.10.18).

Square. LDF promoted London as a centre for contemporary design to a global audience. It also represented a new platform for curatorial practice, generating new roles for the curator developing programmes and events for the festival that were outside of the museum and gallery.

In the same way that the design exhibition and the design festival did much to open up the subject of contemporary design to an expanded audience, the design journal also helped to map, label and define the new and unfamiliar territories of design, style and taste during a period of intense interest in such topics. Jeremy Myerson has described the 1980s as “a schizophrenic decade” when Britain presented a picture of design in all its “schizophrenic glory”. For Myerson, it was the decade of *The Face*, the Lloyds Building, Next and the Channel 4 logo and a time of innovation, ambition and restless entrepreneurialism.<sup>129</sup> New magazines were launched with the intention of surveying and critically assessing developments in the design sector.

Launched in 1983, *Blueprint* was the first magazine to address both architecture and design. It was established by architect Peter Murray and edited by design critic, Deyan Sudjic, with the financial backing of leading architects and designers including Terence Conran, Rodney Fitch, Norman Foster and Richard Rogers. The range of subject matter and the magazine’s tabloid format, designed by art director Simon Esterson, was influenced by the content of the New York-based magazine, *Metropolis*, established in 1981.<sup>130</sup> In *B is for Bauhaus*, Sudjic recalls the early ambitions for the magazine:-

“Blueprint set out to be iconoclastic, disposable, and tried to root architecture, design, graphics, fashion and the visual world in the popular culture of the time.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Jeremy Myerson, ‘A schizophrenic decade’ in ‘Best of British: 1960-1999 Four Decades of Design’, *The Observer* in association with D&AD, 1999: 16.

<sup>130</sup> Metropolis website. Available at: <https://www.metropolismag.com/about-metropolis/> (Accessed 20.10.18).

<sup>131</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *B is for Bauhaus*, London: Penguin Books, 2014: 43.

*Blueprint* positioned itself as London's leading magazine of architecture and design and offered a fresh and unconventional approach aimed at keeping readers updated on the latest styles and trends in the design community. Profiles of designers such as Rei Kawakubo, Katherine Hamnett, Paul Smith and Issey Miyake, together with articles on nightclubs restaurants and boutique hotels, offered an opportunity to examine a range of design disciplines from fashion to car design, and to explore new centres of design such as Tokyo that were making an impact on the design industry. The magazine was also unique in featuring portrait photographs of designers, rather than products or buildings, on its covers and by so doing, conferring an almost celebrity status on their subjects.<sup>132</sup> This interest in the individual designer was reflected in the ongoing dominance of monographic design exhibitions at museums, a factor that will be discussed in more detail in relation to the development of the Design Museum, London in Chapter 3.



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<sup>132</sup> Past editors of *Blueprint* have included; Rowan Moore, formerly director of the Architecture Foundation; Marcus Field, formerly arts editor of *The Independent on Sunday* and now founder and editor of *Dezeen* and Vicky Richardson, formerly Director of the Architecture, Design, Fashion department at the British Council, London.

**Fig. 14:** Front cover of *Blueprint*, Number 98, June 1993.

Other new publications dedicated to design, advertising and marketing were launched during this period and also helped to open up design to a wider audience. *Creative Review* launched in 1980, *Design Week* in 1996 and *Wallpaper* was launched in 1996 by journalists Tyler Brûlé and Alexander Geringer. Alice Twemlow has noted the important role of these independent design publications describing them as “public sites of debate and exchange”.<sup>133</sup>

Many youth culture and style magazines aimed at a more populist market were launched during the period such as *The Face*, *Sky*, *Blitz* and *Arena*. Alongside music and fashion, the magazines carried features on design. The May 1985 issue of *The Face* featured articles on contemporary architecture, profiles of designers Nigel Coates and Ron Arad and the magazine’s art director Neville Brody. The June 1985 issue carried a profile of design entrepreneur, Terence Conran, who would establish the Design Museum in 1989.<sup>134</sup>

New television programmes also helped to open up the subject of design to non-specialist audiences. In 1981 the BBC launched a series of Horizon programmes titled *Little Boxes* about design and scientific thinking written and presented by design critic, Stephen Bayley and directed by television producer, Patrick Uden. It featured interviews with industrial designers such as Raymond Loewy and Dieter Rams. In 1986 the *BBC Design Awards*, presented by media personality Janet Street Porter, attempted to engage viewers by inviting them to vote for their favourite example of contemporary design. The BBC also began a *Design Classics* series in 1987 commissioned by Alan Yentob with thirty minute episodes fronted by design experts, that included Penny Sparke, discussing the design and impact of products such as the Volkswagen Beetle, Sony Walkman,

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<sup>133</sup> Alice Twemlow, *Sifting the Trash: A history of design criticism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017: 138.

<sup>134</sup> *The Face*, May 1985 and June 1985, the Design Museum Archives, London.

Barcelona chair, Coca-Cola bottle and Levi's 501 jeans. In 1984 Channel 4's *Hey Good Looking* series devoted programmes to four subjects, Style, Architecture, Design and Advertising, written and presented by Peter York, Deyan Sudjic, Stephen Bayley and Janet Street Porter respectively.<sup>135</sup>

These new and very visible promotional vehicles for design were not intended solely for those working in the sector but helped to open up design to a wider public audience. What is also significant is that many of the individuals involved in the launch of these platforms, namely Terence Conran, Stephen Bayley and Deyan Sudjic, went on to play a significant role in the development of a permanent platform for contemporary design in London, the Design Museum, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

## **1.6 New Programmes to Train Curators**

The increasing number and popularity of design exhibitions required curators who could make sense of this rapidly changing landscape for design. These developments had the effect of creating new areas of practice for the curator but they also called for a specialist skill set. Notable in the exhibitions discussed in the previous section are the number of individuals who were graduates of the MA Design History programme at the Royal College of Art, run jointly with the V&A.

During the 1990s a proliferation of curating courses began to emerge aimed at training students across all fields of curating. In 1992 the Royal College of Art (RCA) was one of the first higher educational institutions to establish a masters programme in Curating Contemporary Art in partnership with a major museum, the V&A. The programme was significant in that it recognised a need to teach theory and practice taking curatorial research outside of the university and into the museum. The course put a strong focus on the study of the intellectual and theoretical discipline combined with vocational training in curatorial practice.

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<sup>135</sup> Alice Twemlow, *Sifting the Trash: A history of design criticism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017: 140.

In 2001 the Design Museum established its first postgraduate programme with Kingston University. The MA in Curating Contemporary Design was the idea of Design Museum Director Paul Thompson and design historians Catherine McDermott and Penny Sparke, who had joined Kingston University from the RCA in 1999.<sup>136</sup> In September 2000 an advertisement for the course appeared in *Museums Journal* which stated the following:-

“The Design Museum and Kingston University will launch an MA in Curating Contemporary Design in Autumn 2000. This will be the first postgraduate course to prepare students for a career in the museums sector, event management or trade venue specialising in contemporary design.”<sup>137</sup>

The advertisement went on to explain that students would receive a strong grounding in the specialised nature of curating contemporary design and knowledge of the interpretative, educational, marketing and financial aspects of the discipline. They would be involved in all aspects of planning and organising live exhibitions. Leading practitioners and visiting tutors would be invited to hold lectures and seminars that identified the key areas of curating contemporary design.

The promotion for the new course communicates two key shifts. The partnership with the Design Museum alludes to the specificity of design with a strong focus on the curating of design, rather than art. It also suggests the idea of an expanded field of practice in preparing students not just for a career in museums, but also for areas outside the traditional museum or gallery, such as retail, events management or trade fairs.

The masters in Curating Contemporary Design offered by Kingston

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<sup>136</sup> *Curating Contemporary Design: Definitive Field Document*, Faculty of Design, Kingston University, June 2000, MA CCD course files, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>137</sup> ‘MA Curating Contemporary Design, A unique course starting Autumn 2000’, Training and Conferences, *Museums Journal*, September 2000: 49. the Design Museum Archives, London.

University in partnership with the Design Museum was quickly followed by other postgraduate curatorial programmes. Together they formed an extensive international portfolio of training opportunities in this new field of practice. Individually they offered a specialist focus in different areas of curatorial practice such as MA Fashion Curation established at London College of Fashion and MA Narrative Environments at Central Saint Martins.

By 2006 other postgraduate curating courses were in development, namely an MA in Curating at Sunderland, Sheffield Hallam and Leeds Metropolitan Universities and an MA Curating New Media Art at Liverpool John Moore's. The courses can be interpreted as the first stage in the emergence of a new contemporary curatorial discourse which was being led by, and for, a new generation of curators. The new courses were training curators and equipping them with skills that addressed traditional forms of research, writing and exhibition-making alongside training in new contexts such as online platforms, broadcasting and more experimental media and display formats. More importantly, the establishment of the masters programme at Kingston University and the Design Museum indicated that design curating was developing as a new academic discourse and professional opportunity.

Testament to this fact is that, since 2001, many CCD course graduates have taken up high profile posts in the sector. Catherine Ince, formerly a curator at the Barbican, London, is now Senior Curator with responsibility for developing the V&A East in Stratford opening in 2021. Nina Due, formerly Head of Exhibitions at the Design Museum, London, is now Director of the Röhsska Museum, Gothenburg. Sarah Mann, who was Head of Learning and Participation at Somerset House between 2008 and 2012, is now Director of Architecture Design Fashion at The British Council. Sumitra Upham, previously Associate Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, is now Curator of Public Programmes at the Design Museum, London.

MA CCD graduates have also been leading change internationally and reflect the opportunities for curators in many different global contexts and cultural locations. Gina Ha-Gorlin, the British Museum's first Korean curator gained an Arts Council Fellowship to increase diversity within the museum profession; Eunjoo Maing is part of the Korean Institute of Design Promotion's (KIDP) senior team and an International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) board member; Rafael Chikukwa, the course's first African curator, is Chief Curator at the National Gallery, Zimbabwe and Keinton Butler is Senior Curator of Design and Architecture at the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS), Sydney.<sup>138</sup>

The course has also been actively building contacts with China where there is a clear demand for curator training programmes seeing China as an emerging market for design and curatorial practice. Since 2005, funding from the Sino British Fellowship Trust has awarded a bursary to a Chinese student each year enabling them to take up a period of study in London. The destinations of course graduates show that design curating has become an important professional opportunity in China. Danful Yang is designer and creative director at the Pearl Lam Design Gallery, Shanghai; Ning Li is Deputy Director of the Collection department at the China Art Museum, Shanghai; Shengnan Liu is Arts Manager for Creative Industries Development at the British Council, Beijing.<sup>139</sup>

The postgraduate training programmes have contributed to an increased critical focus on the practice of curating in the UK and internationally. They have also produced curators who are now promoting contemporary design in a range of contexts. Interviewed for an article exploring the rise of postgraduate programmes in curating in 2006, Professor Catherine McDermott, then Course Director for MA Curating Contemporary Design,

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<sup>138</sup> MA CCD alumni also include; Renata Becceril who runs the Mexican Open Design Festival; Arpna Gupta, part of a new wave of independent curators in India and Fleur Watson, Curator of the Design Hub, RMIT, Melbourne.

<sup>139</sup> MA CCD graduate Henry Lu is a Reader and Design Writer at Luxun Academy of Fine Arts(LAFA), Dalian. He is currently writing a book on design museums of the world, to feature the Design Museum, London.



commented on this expanding field:-

“We don’t see curating as a museum activity. We’re interested in developing a group who can respond to whatever the creative industries require, be that in design practice, retail, government policy or public space. Our graduates could end up curating for anyone from the Science Museum to Selfridges.”<sup>140</sup>

## Conclusion

The emergence of the design museum in the late twentieth century provided a dedicated space for the display and interpretation of the industrial object in mass production. As Paul Warwick Thompson stated in the foreword to a book on twentieth century design published in 1997:-

“Unlike a traditional museum of the decorative arts, the Design Museum is a museum solely of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, concerned exclusively with the products, technologies and buildings of the industrial and post-industrial world.”<sup>141</sup>

From its origins in the eighteenth century cabinet of curiosities and the nineteenth century international exhibitions, the museum of decorative arts and the modern art museum, the new museum of contemporary design now had a definition and a purpose. Its development coalesced with the expanding discipline of design history, an increase in design-focused museums globally and a rising public interest in design. New curatorial training programmes provided curators with the skills required to communicate this new field of curatorial practice. Design was now perceived to be a subject worthy of study and appreciation in the context of the public museum.

In the 1990s and 2000s a series of political, social and cultural shifts fundamentally changed the way in which museums perceived their

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<sup>140</sup> Tim Walker, ‘Exhibiting an eye for the contemporary’, *The Independent*, 18 May 2006. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/exhibiting-an-eye-for-the-contemporary-478702.html> (Accessed 20.07.15).

<sup>141</sup> Paul Warwick Thompson cited in Catherine McDermott, *20th Century Design*, London: Carlton, 1997: 6.

audiences, setting in motion a paradigmatic shift in the way that curators engaged with their visitors. The following chapter identifies these broader shifts, analysing their influence on curating practice and the way in which design exhibitions were conceived and presented.

## CHAPTER 2:

### The Curatorial Turn, 1980 - 2018

**“Museums must change or die. They must compete in the modern world for their audiences and their resources against other leisure activities and - in a time when there are too many museums and other heritage attractions with new ones still opening and the audience at best static - against each other.”**

Graham Black (2005)<sup>142</sup>

In 2005 museums and heritage specialist, Graham Black, delivered a call to action. In *The Engaging Museum*, he argued that museums must transform themselves if they are to remain relevant to twenty-first century audiences. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the primary role of museums had been to collect objects, classify, document, conserve and put them on display. Black was recognising that, since the 1908s, society had changed, bringing with it new demands on the cultural sector. Modern museums needed to justify their existence, generate far more of their own income, broaden their audience bases, reflect their communities and enhance their role as learning institutions.

Black was also implying that audiences had changed and, with more demands on their leisure time and many more competing alternatives for that time, were far less willing to accept a passive role as cultural consumers. This would increasingly mean that museums would need to expand their offer to meet the varying needs of different audience segments and individuals, and to reflect the fact that most visitors will demand a multiple range of experiences during their visit. Black proposed a clear vision for a museum of the future that “engages, stimulates and inspires the publics it serves.”<sup>143</sup>

Black’s position was connecting to a debate that had dominated the museum sector since the late 1990s. In 1998 academics and marketing

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<sup>142</sup> Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement*, London: Routledge, 2005: 267.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.: 268.

consultants, Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler had acknowledged a similar shift as museums faced the twenty-first century:-

“The most successful museums offer a range of experiences that appeal to different audience segments and reflect the varying needs of individual visitors...successful museums provide multiple experiences: aesthetic and emotional delight, celebration and learning, recreation and sociability.”<sup>144</sup>

In the same year Caroline Reinhardt, writing in *The Spectator*, was one of a number of cultural commentators who had detected a similar shift:-

“There is something happening behind the scenes at the museum. A revolution has taken place in its philosophy, which would like to see the glass cases smashed. Today’s museum aims to be genuinely populist. It welcomes - indeed seeks out - all sectors of the community, and eschews anything that smacks of elitism. Explanatory material (preferably using state-of-the-art technology) is pitched at the simplest possible level. And, above all, the new museum seeks to pull its head out of the historical sand to address issues in the contemporary world.”<sup>145</sup>

These debates were in direct response to a rapidly changing landscape for culture in the UK. They were driven by a series of political and social changes that were to have a major impact on museums in the years leading up to the millennium. The shift was also due to new challenges facing the sector, most notably cuts to government funding for the arts, increasing competition from other sectors, such as retail and leisure, and declining visitor numbers. Museums were forced to look sideways in order to understand what was happening around them and to question the very nature of the visitor experience they offered in an attempt to expand audiences, but also to more effectively engage them.

This chapter charts and analyses these key shifts, as a way of defining the debates that were circulating in the museum and cultural sector during the

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<sup>144</sup> Neil G. Kotler and P. Kotler, *Museum Strategy and Marketing: Designing Missions, Building Audiences, Generating Revenue and Resources*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008: xx.

<sup>145</sup> Caroline Reinhardt, ‘History with attitude: Elitism is out, populism is in’, *The Spectator*, 4 April 1998: 43-44.

late 1990s and early 2000s. It explores how these shifts influenced many different aspects of curatorial practice ranging from exhibition design, display techniques, interpretive tools and marketing strategies through to the changing relationship between the areas of curatorial and education in museums. These developments presented both opportunities and challenges for curators and marked a moment when the boundaries constituting the role of the curator and the field in which they operated significantly expanded. Such shifts in curatorial practice led to an expanding curator-led discourse but they were discussed largely in relation to curating fine art, neglecting the area of design curating altogether. I want to appropriate a term first used by Paul O'Neill to describe such shifts within the practice of curating contemporary art, and use it to analyse the practice of curating contemporary design.<sup>146</sup> The “curatorial turn” can be applied to characterise professional practice in contemporary design and the approaches of curators working in the field.

## **2.1 A Changing Political Landscape for Museums**

The first noticeable shift was in response to changing government policies towards culture and their impact on the museum sector. In 1980s Britain, the role of the museum was scrutinised as never before and became the subject of heated debate within professional cultural heritage circles and at government level. Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. The policies of a new conservative government changed Britain significantly during the 1980s. With a post-war economy defined by competitive global trading, old industries declined and new service economies and digital manufacturing developed and boomed. One of the main tenets of the Thatcher government was a move away from a culture of dependency to one of enterprise and a new approach on self-reliance across all

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<sup>146</sup> Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse' in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.), Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007: 13-28.

sectors.<sup>147</sup>

In the cultural sector cuts were swiftly implemented which impacted severely on cultural institutions. Previously 'high culture', a term which describes cultural sectors including museums, had not needed to justify its existence. Frances Spalding has described how up until 1989 the Tate Gallery employed a single accountant to file all the institution's accounts and trustees were never issued with any breakdown of the annual accounts.<sup>148</sup> Karsten Schubert summarises the prevailing situation when he states:-

"In the past, the curator was considered primarily the guardian of the collection he was in charge of, and his duties could be summed up as sourcing new acquisitions, researching, conserving and displaying. The director was a benign scholarly figure at the helm, overseen by an equally amenable board of trustees, an air of eccentricity and amateurism hung over everything. The museum was the ivory tower par excellence where questions of accountability - ideological or financial - hardly ever came up, a place reassuringly insulated from the bustle of the outside world and the perceived ugliness of politics."<sup>149</sup>

By the mid-1980s public sector museums were under enormous pressure to become more economically viable. Stephen Deuchar, formerly Director of Tate Britain before moving to the Art Fund, recalls the time when public funding for the arts was cut while simultaneously demanding greater tangible outputs in terms of the work rate and the effectiveness of those receiving it and spending it. As Deuchar noted, "partly in response there arose a more overtly populist and commercially driven approach to display

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<sup>147</sup> Roger Bootle, 'Margaret Thatcher: the economic achievements and legacy of Thatcherism', *The Telegraph*, 8 April 2013. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/9979362/Margaret-Thatcher-the-economic-achievements-and-legacy-of-Thatcherism.html> (Accessed 14.05.15).

Michael Adrian Peters, 'Education, Enterprise Culture and the Entrepreneurial Self: A Foucauldian Perspective', *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 2 November 2001. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251429444\\_Education\\_Enterprise\\_Culture\\_and\\_the\\_Entrepreneurial\\_Self\\_A\\_Foucauldian\\_Perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251429444_Education_Enterprise_Culture_and_the_Entrepreneurial_Self_A_Foucauldian_Perspective) (Accessed 14.05.15).

<sup>148</sup> Frances Spalding, *The Tate: A History*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998: 252-253.

<sup>149</sup> Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, London: One-Off Press, 2000: 70-71.

and exhibition making.”<sup>150</sup>

Museums now had to prove themselves in the market place and were subjected to the same level of scrutiny applied to other state-funded areas such as education and health. They were required to demonstrate that they provided a necessary service at a reasonable cost. As a result museums changed from state-funded institutions to revenue-generating enterprises increasingly involved with marketing and fundraising. The audience and its needs were for the first time key to the success of the enterprise. Museums started to track their attendance figures and established separate fundraising, development and marketing departments. As Fiona Candlin’s research has demonstrated, museum directors and curators began to adopt the languages of management, marketing and accountancy as fluently as that of museology and art history.<sup>151</sup>

In 1993 additional capital funding for museums was announced through the newly-established state lottery made possible by the National Lottery Bill. This allowed institutions to address the results of decades of neglect and to bring their buildings and facilities up to date. With the establishment of The National Lottery, responsibility for the UK-wide distribution of National Lottery proceeds was allocated to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The funds were directed at a range of heritage projects and many were aimed at encouraging more people to visit museums, either through developments such as exhibitions, restaurants, expanded shops and upgraded galleries or by building entire new museums, to be discussed later in this chapter.

The museum boom of the late 1980s and 1990s generated a debate about the role and character of museums and the visitor became the focus of

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<sup>150</sup> Stephen Deuchar, ‘Whose Art History? Curators, academics and the museum visitor in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s’ in G. Kavanagh (ed), *Making Histories in Museums*, London: Leicester University Press, 2002: 105-115.

<sup>151</sup> Fiona Candlin, ‘Independent Museums, Heritage, and the Shape of Museum Studies’, *Museum and Society*, 10(1), March 2012: 28-41.

curatorial thinking. Museums considered new strategies to increase attendance figures in order to justify public expenditure and attract sponsorship. In a journal paper reflecting on the British heritage debates of the 1980s and 1990s, Fiona Candlin explains how museums needed to generate income with many following the lead of larger and more commercially-minded independent organisations.<sup>152</sup> This resulted in a flurry of blockbuster exhibitions and the evolution of experience-centred initiatives such as theme and leisure parks. A number of new venues were established by private individuals, special interest groups or businesses and they largely operated independently of the public sector. They had relatively low budgets, small numbers of staff and concentrated on a diverse range of subjects such as pasta, whisky, wurlitzers, barbed wire and immigration. Museums went through something of a makeover and introduced merchandising and catering facilities and embraced other money-making enterprises. As Candlin comments, “Cafes, corporate hire and gift shops are no longer the signs of vulgarity but of survival.”<sup>153</sup> Museums started to position themselves as brands and commissioned new graphic identities, all of which prompted the cultural historian Frederique Huygen to comment that British museums had started to look like shops, and shops like museums.<sup>154</sup>

The results of this shift in museums can be seen most visibly at the V&A, London, when Director Elizabeth Esteve-Coll caused uproar by restructuring the senior staffing, changing the traditional duties of curators and sanctioning more popular culture exhibitions which had the result of provoking the resignations of expert curators. Esteve-Coll was accused of taking the prestigious museum downmarket by her decision in 1998 to commission the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi to devise a

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<sup>152</sup> Fiona Candlin, ‘Independent Museums, Heritage, and the Shape of Museum Studies’, *Museum and Society*, 10(1), March 2012: 28-41.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>154</sup> Frederique Huygen, *British Design: Image and Identity*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1989.



marketing campaign of six posters describing the V&A as, "An ace caff, with quite a nice museum attached." The campaign series, produced by Paul Arden and Jeff Stark for Saatchi & Saatchi in the late 1980s, was part of the V&A's campaign to make the museum more attractive and accessible to the general public. The depiction of an eighteenth century ivory sculpture in the V&A collections, *Venus and Cupid* circa 1718 by David Le Marchand, combined with the plain-spoken language in the poster's copy was intended to emphasize the easy, democratic nature of accessing the V&A collections. Alan Borg, who followed Esteve-Coll as director, faced similar opposition when he brought in compulsory admission charges. These moves resulted in a rapid decline in visitors and very public tensions with museum trustees.<sup>155</sup>



**Fig. 15:** V&A marketing campaign, *An ace caff with quite a nice museum attached*, Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising Ltd, 1998.

A change of government in 1997 introduced reforms that were in direct opposition to what were perceived as Tory cuts, indifference and neglect.

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<sup>155</sup> David Lister, 'V&A gains Three Graces and Loses a Director', *The Independent*, 13 December 1994. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/v-a-gains-three-graces-and-loses-a-director-1389364.html> (Accessed 12.05.17).

When Labour came to power, they demanded that it was time to move Britain on and to deliver opportunity for all through realising the talent of all. With education at the top of its agenda, government policy forged a national purpose for rapid and radical improvement in schools, colleges and universities. Labour's manifesto pledge became the rallying cry for a generation:-

"Our top priority was, is and always will be education, education, education. To overcome decades of neglect and make Britain a learning society, developing the talents and raising the ambitions of all our young people. At a good school children gain the basic tools for life and work. But they ought also to learn the joy of life: the exhilaration of music, the excitement of sport, the beauty of art, the magic of science. And they learn the value of life: what it is to be responsible citizens who give something back to their community."<sup>156</sup>

Labour rejected the hard-nosed commercialism of the 1980s and increased funding for the cultural sector. Levels of funding for public sector museums were increased enabling museums to eliminate entrance fees. With museums receiving eighty-one million visits per year, Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, saw museums as catalysts for urban regeneration, and wanted more.<sup>157</sup> He claimed that more money was being spent on museums than on any other single sector in the culture industry. In a building boom unprecedented in its speed and intensity, museums spent £524 million of Heritage Lottery funding over a period of four years.<sup>158</sup>

In a lecture at the 2000 European Museum Forum, Neil Cossons, Director of the Science Museum in London, commented on the fact that museums had never been more numerous or more popular which, in turn, had generated a new and increasingly public debate about the nature of

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<sup>156</sup> A full text of Tony Blair's speech on education delivered at the Labour manifesto launch appeared in *The Guardian* on 23 May 2001.

<sup>157</sup> Chris Smith was appointed by Tony Blair as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in 1997, a post he held until 2001.

<sup>158</sup> Paul Teasdale, 'How to measure the value of museums', *Frieze*, 14 March 2018. Available at: <https://frieze.com/article/how-measure-value-museums> (Accessed 20.03.18).

museums and their role in society:-

“In recent months I have heard professional museum colleagues talk of paradigm shifts in the way in which museums relate to their audiences. They have observed a rate of change in museums that is apparently unparalleled.”<sup>159</sup>

Cossons attributes this development to a combination of factors such as increases in people’s disposable income, more time in which to spend it, a progressive reduction in the cost of global travel and the advent of new digital communications technologies. In his view, society was becoming income-rich but time-poor. With growing competition for people’s time compounded by improvements in mobility and access, he argues that such a seismic shift had caused a recalibration of cultural parameters. It was forcing museums to change in response to such debates from within the sector and a variety of drivers and pressures outside it.<sup>160</sup>

At the same time, the Museums Association, the governing body for museums in the UK, was campaigning for change. It championed the role of museums in learning and stressed the importance of access for all. In 2001 re:source, the council for museums, archives and libraries, was commissioned by the, then, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith, to look into the state of museums and galleries in the English regions. The subsequent report, *Renaissance in the Regions: A new vision for England’s museums* advocated that museums, as one of the enduring legacies of the nineteenth-century, were committed to education for all. They played a vital role in spreading knowledge and enjoyment in the twentieth century, but were facing special challenges. The report stressed the need to shape and secure the future of museums and galleries, important national cultural assets that had been neglected for a generation or more.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Neil Cossons, *Industrial Museums in the New Millennium*, The 2000 European Museum Forum Lecture. Available at: <http://www.europeanmuseumforum.info/elibrary>. (Accessed 4.07.17).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.: Available at: <http://www.europeanmuseumforum.info/elibrary>. (Accessed 4.07.17).

<sup>161</sup> *Renaissance in the Regions: A new vision for England’s museums* published by re:source, the council for museums, archives and libraries, September 2001.

Funding agreements drawn up by the DCMS to cover the period 2003-2006 show that the eighteen museums they directly funded were required to attract more visitors from ethnic minorities and increase the number of children that visited their exhibitions by a total of seven million.<sup>162</sup> In order to attract these new and diverse audiences, public museums needed to more effectively engage with their audiences and, as a result, new curatorial strategies were introduced.

Recognising that audiences did not necessarily have prior knowledge of the museum's collections, explanatory wall texts and published guides were made more freely available. Extensive education programmes were devised with the intention of making collections more accessible to diverse audiences. Curators began to make provision for children and for visitors with special needs. Multimedia resources offered visitors the opportunity to pursue their own interests in greater depth. In the course of this transformation, museums also adopted some of the interpretation techniques pioneered by the independent museums such as live interpretation by costumed actors. The V&A introduced dressing up boxes for children and the British Museum provided Roman soldier costumes for school groups.<sup>163</sup>

An analysis of the responses to these changes in the press and academic journals provides an indication of prevailing opinions in the sector at the time. The results of the National Lottery culture-building boom of the 1990s and 2000s had its many successes, but as curator Kieran Long later reflected, there were also plenty of institutions without a mission, with no clear sense of public duty, and with an offer pitched somewhere between didactic educational experience and theme park. He also noted that, "too many museums are obsessed with contemporary fine art, and not enough with the crossovers between artistic production and design,

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<sup>162</sup> Fiona Candlin, 'Independent Museums, Heritage, and the Shape of Museum Studies', *Museum & Society*, Volume 10, 2012: 34.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

digital, architecture, technology, science, anthropology and history.”<sup>164</sup>

For some museum professionals, the frenzy of building new museums had led to the downgrading of staff and the dilution of expertise. Celina Fox, a founding curator at the Museum of London in the 1970s, commented that “the danger is that marketing will consume the resources: you cannot run museums on style alone.”<sup>165</sup> Writing in 1999 Simon Tait, arts correspondent for the *Financial Times*, suggested that as museums compete with theme parks, multiplex cinemas and sports centres for attention, curators were being made redundant while the survivors were losing ground in the museum hierarchy to marketing managers and development directors. In Tait’s view, curators were becoming “an endangered species” threatened by a new realism sweeping through museums; “If they are to avoid extinction, curators need to break out of their glass cases and realise that they are part of the entertainment business.”<sup>166</sup>

For others, the shifts were interpreted as an inevitable part of progress. As the newly appointed Director of the Museum of London, Simon Thurley declared; “Curators don’t really understand people, do they? We’ve got to give people reasons for coming here.”<sup>167</sup> Neil Cossons, Director of the Science Museum, London is quoted as saying that visitors should get what they want from their trip, “if curators can’t supply it, then someone else will. To survive curators must become communicators.”<sup>168</sup>

Museums implemented a programme of exhibitions and displays to attract new visitors and established new criteria to grow their audiences. Growing

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<sup>164</sup> Stella Duffy and Kieran Long, ‘Are we building too many museums?’, *RA Magazine*, 21 May 2015. Available at: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/the-question-are-we-building-too> (Accessed 30.05.15).

<sup>165</sup> Celina Fox cited in Simon Tait, ‘Curatosaurus ex?’, ‘How To Spend It’, *Financial Times*, 1999: 34.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

visitor numbers equated with better quality, a more inspirational and imaginative offer and curators more attuned to the needs of their audiences. Tait concluded his article with the comment:-

“As we build ever more fabulous palaces of discovery, we will need more curators, not fewer. But they will need to understand that they are responsible for more than just the objects in their care, that they are part of a multi-million pound entertainment industry for which they must learn the psychology and language of the consumer.”<sup>169</sup>

When the V&A opened a £31 million refurbishment of its British Galleries 1500-1900 in 2001, it was the result of an ambitious, five-year project financed in part by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The galleries were hailed as groundbreaking and went on to win for the V&A the European Museum of the Year Award in 2003.<sup>170</sup> The galleries were extensive both in terms of floor space; 3,400 square metres and the number of objects; 3,000. They also presented a new museological approach to British decorative and fine art and were distinguished by their engagement with a broad range of historical themes, as well as by their use of a variety of interpretative methods aimed at providing for the needs of different museum visitors.<sup>171</sup>

In an article for the V&A's conservation journal, Nicholas Humphrey, a member of the project team for the Tudor and Stuart Gallery, explained the museum's design and interpretive approach and the factors that had influenced this approach:-

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<sup>169</sup> Simon Tait, 'Curatosaurus ex?', 'How To Spend It', *Financial Times*, 1999: 34

<sup>170</sup> European Museum of the Year website. Available at: <https://europeanforum.museum/winners/emya/> (Accessed 5.09.15).

<sup>171</sup> Christopher Wilk, *Creating the British Galleries at the V&A: A Study in Museology*, London: V&A Publications, 2004.

“What we know less about, and yet know to be crucial to the success of these galleries, is our audiences. They are certainly varied, from tourist visitors who may speak no English to school children and family groups, as well as specialists and students. Audience research into the ways museum visitors learn is being carried out, and the results fed back into the design process by educators working on three gallery teams. What is well established is that some people prefer to learn in museums from a practical 'hands-on' approach while others are more interested in starting from a theory and applying it.”<sup>172</sup>

Humphrey explained that traditionally the V&A had presented displays for analytical learners, those who learn by thinking and watching and who look for facts and intellectual comprehension, but had offered less for others, such as those who like to try things out for themselves or who look for personal meanings in objects. The new Galleries attempted to provide for all learning styles creating spaces that were inspiring and welcoming but also places for enjoyment and learning.

The new galleries included a number of different interpretive devices, placed next to the objects to which they related. In many cases, videos replaced conventional labels to communicate an object's story. These ranged from a video that showed how an object was made; a practical exercise reconstructing the elements of a replica object; an activity asking visitors to spot the difference between objects and their imitations to an audio programme retelling the story depicted on an object. Reviewing the exhibition for *The Telegraph*, Richard Dormant described it as “combining entertainment and instruction, the V&A's new British Galleries are a triumph of curatorial ingenuity.”<sup>173</sup>

The galleries were designed by Casson Mann, an exhibition design

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<sup>172</sup> Nicholas Humphrey, 'The New British Galleries at the V&A', *V&A Conservation Journal*, Issue 27, April 1998. Available at: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/issue-27/the-new-british-galleries-at-the-v-and-a/> (Accessed 5.09.15).

<sup>173</sup> Richard Dormant, 'The Great British Variety Show', *The Telegraph*, 21 November 2001. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4726673/The-great-British-variety-show.html> (Accessed 6.12.15).

company established in 1994 by Dinah Casson and Roger Mann. During the late 1990s they were responsible for designing a number of high profile museum galleries, displays and exhibitions. In 2000 they designed the Wellcome Wing at the Science Museum, London, which explored the impact of digital technology. In describing their intention behind the design of the British Galleries, the designers said:-

“Our design intent was that visitors would *feel* and recognise the story rather than learn or read about it. We did away with too much text, too much dependency on eyes and we introduced touch and sound. We varied the pace, texture, acoustic, density, colour and interactivity. In this exhibition 3,000 objects are distributed over 3,000 square metres; but the story is irresistible.”<sup>174</sup>



**Fig. 16:** Display on Style in the Baroque period, The British Galleries at the V&A, 2001. Curated by Christopher Wilk and Sarah Medlam. Exhibition design: Casson Mann.

The positive aspects brought about by the new museums and displays also prompted accusations of dumbing down. Museums came under increasing criticism for their high-tech methods of display and interpretation and adoption of theme-park effects and ‘disneyesque’ techniques. At the opening of a £61 million redevelopment at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 2009, journalist Kathy Brewis was highly

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<sup>174</sup> The British Galleries Project Overview. Available at: <http://cassonmann.com/#!/project/galleries> (Accessed 20.08.17).



critical of the the loss of traditional showcases featuring “all sorts of peculiar objects” and a move to “themed galleries full of gimmicks” which she argued were actively discouraging the museum visitor from using their imaginations:-

“It’s as though someone has taken all the worst facets of 21st century life - our reliance on gizmos and gadgets, our burden of political correctness and our constant need to be entertained - bottled them and piped them into the curator’s brains while they were sleeping... what remains is educational in the narrowest sense: informational rather than thought-provoking.”<sup>175</sup>

In spite of accusations of “dumbing down”, the new approaches to museum exhibitions and displays did result in increased visitor numbers. In a more recent article in *The Sunday Times* magazine, Hilary McGrady, the Director-General of the National Trust, suggests a reason why this approach has been so successful. When responding to reports of accusations of “Disneyfication” levelled at the National Trust by some of its members in response to a programme of decluttering properties to make way for the installation of interactive exhibitions and staff wearing period fancy dress, McGrady said; “debate is good, it’s what keeps us contemporary and relevant, and goes to the heart of the many paradoxes that exist in the trust.” The article concludes with the fact that the National Trust’s membership is now at the highest in its history.<sup>176</sup>

## **2.2 The Educational Turn: The Museum as an Ideal Learning Environment**

A growing professionalism in museums along with a climate that included the watchwords of accountability, customer service and access for all made education a serious and central function in museums. The 1980s were watershed years, as an increasing number of educators joined exhibition development meetings and curators opened up to a new areas of expertise. Educators brought visitor’s perspectives to bear on the

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<sup>175</sup> Kathy Brewis, ‘Who are the curators kidding?’, *The Times*, 27 October 2009: 10.

<sup>176</sup> Katie Glass, ‘Has the Trust Lost the Plot?’, *Sunday Times* magazine, 25 March 2018: 24-27.

treatment of collections, how they should be displayed, what was said about them and who does the saying. By insisting on more shared authority over objects and what they represent, educators gave visitors a voice in determining the significance of collections. The significance of these changes is considerable and marks a major shift in museums. Lisa Roberts argues that educators have been at the forefront of what can only be described as a paradigm shift in museums:-

“It would appear that these one time Towers of Babel comprise...not a synopsis of wisdom but a multitude of voices. Theirs is an enterprise that is concerned less with knowledge than with narrative.”<sup>177</sup>

The shift sparked a change in the way that the role of education was understood in the museum. The task of the education department was increasingly to make exhibitions and collections accessible to visitors. It led to changing practices in the museum with the development of new learning programmes. It also led to shifting responsibilities in museum programming teams with more joined-up thinking between curators and educators.

The theoretical underpinnings of this shift in perspective can be found in a number of new publications by specialists in the museum and heritage sector in the 1990s. The studies became important disseminators of the key debates and proponents of new ideas. Studies by educational theorists advocated a new approach to museology by placing an emphasis on visitors and their experiences in the museum and argued for new thinking about accessibility, the social function of the museum, participation programmes and the increasingly important role of museum education.<sup>178</sup> The studies contested that a new visitor-centred approach would help museums to compete with other educational and leisure institutions in the contemporary world.

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<sup>177</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997: 3.

<sup>178</sup> Publications include: Peter Vergo, *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989 and Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994.

In a number of influential studies produced during the 1990s and 2000s, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill addressed the changing relationship of museums and galleries to their audiences. In *Museums and their Visitors*, she asserted that museums were at a critical moment in their history. In order to ensure survival into the next century, museums and galleries had to demonstrate their social relevance and use. They needed to develop their public service functions through becoming more knowledgeable about the needs of their visitors and more adept at providing enjoyable and worthwhile experiences. She argues that this expansion in scope and ambition of museum programmes and activities would inevitably impact on the role of the curator in contemporary museums:-

“The thrust of the shift is clear - museums are changing from being static storehouses for artefacts into active learning environments for people. This change in function means radical reorganisation of the whole culture of the museum - staff structures, attitudes and work patterns must all mutate to accommodate new ideas and new approaches. In addition to looking inward to their collections, museums are now looking outwards to their audiences.”<sup>179</sup>

Hooper-Greenhill was describing a radical shift which had implications for museums as their focus began to shift from collections to one that was increasingly visitor-engaged and public-facing. She argues that for too long, museums had defended the values of scholarship, research and collection at the expense of the needs of their visitors. The challenge for museums was to preserve traditional museum concerns, but to combine them with the educational values that focus on how the objects cared for in museums can add to the quality of life for all. She urges that, “a new role has had to be found for museums.”<sup>180</sup> For Hooper-Greenhill, the museum presented itself as the ideal learning environment.

Informing this key development in museums were a range of learning theories, developed mainly by psychologists and researchers outside the museum sector, that had helped to build an understanding of how

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<sup>179</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994: 1.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*: 2.

visitors learn in museums.<sup>181</sup> The main tenet underpinning the various theories is that visitors learn in different ways with each learning type exhibiting different characteristics. The museum artefact does not have a fixed meaning, rather it is subject to multiple interpretations shaped by the personal significance and meaning that the visitor brings to it. The significant debates over the educational role of the museum which have taken place more recently have been very much informed by these theories. Museums educators and curators have drawn on this body of research in order to better understand their audiences, how their visitors learn and how learning can be encouraged in the museum environment.<sup>182</sup>

This section references a small selection of learning theories which have influenced the museum learning model and its practice since the 1980s. It is not the purpose here to consider these theories in detail. However, a summary review is necessary as a precursor to an exploration of the typological distinctiveness of museum-based learning and its relevance to curating design.

Prior to the 1980s museums had traditionally been perceived as centres of research about their respective collections. As museum work began to be professionalised during the early twentieth century, it was marked by a period of increased specialisation and a separation of fields of practice within the museum. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the first public museums the areas of ‘curation’ and ‘education’ were presented as distinct areas of work, based on quite different sets of knowledge and experience.

Traditionally, the relationship between them was hierarchical; first came the exhibition and then began the educational work of conveying its contents to as many people as possible. Priority was given to collections and research with education lagging far behind. Curators increasingly

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<sup>181</sup> A helpful summary of the key learning theories is presented by J.A. Palmer (ed.) in *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present*, London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>182</sup> Helen Charman discusses the impact of these learning theories on her own practice in her PhD thesis; *The Productive Eye: Conceptualising Learning in the Design Museum*, PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, 2011.

withdrew from a direct relationship with the visiting public manifesting a “growing scholarly introversion” as the focus fell increasingly on curating exhibitions and maintaining the collection.

Most European museums remained enclaves for the scholar well into the nineteenth century. As Lisa Roberts’ research has demonstrated, it was in the newly established museums of America that the doors were first fully opened to the general public, promoting equality for all through rational enlightenment.<sup>183</sup> In the early twentieth century, the experiences of museum directors such as John Cotton Dana did much to change this rigid structure. Writing in 1910, Dana, the pioneering founder and first director of the Newark Museum in New Jersey, observed:-

“Ancient conventions have museums firmly in hand; ...most museums tend to become storehouses, used more to please and educate curators than to entertain and instruct the public; that they are quite averse to change; and that few among them exercise an influence on their respective communities at all commensurate with the cost of founding and maintenance.”<sup>184</sup>

Dana advocated the museum as an alive and active institution offering entertainment, enlightenment and education. In a series of short pamphlets published between 1917 and 1920, he conceptualised the new museum, promoting them as instruments for popular education and recreation; “a good museum attracts, entertains, arouses curiosity, leads to questions - and thus promotes learning.”<sup>185</sup> He was highly critical of American museums which he considered to be influenced by European-style art museums housed in buildings which were fashioned to look like remote Greek temples or Renaissance palaces. He suggested that a museum devoted entirely to the display of objects had no

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<sup>183</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997: 4.

<sup>184</sup> John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, edited by W.A. Peniston, Washington DC: The Newark Museum Association, New Jersey and The American Association of Museums, 1999: 157.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*: 158.

connection to the lives of most of its potential visitors and was pointless. In his view, the true work of the museum was in enriching the quality of the lives of its visitors, and to entertain, interest and instruct.

For Dana, and of particular relevance to the development of the design museum, the modern museum bore many similarities to the area of commerce and the city department store; it was centrally located, easily reached, open to all at the hours when patrons wished to visit it, received all visitors courteously and issued information freely, its collections were classified according to the knowledge and needs of its patrons, it advertised itself widely and continuously, it changed its exhibits to meet daily changes in subjects of interest, changes in taste and the progress of invention and discovery, as he commented:-

“We think the kind of museum best worth having in your community is the kind that is alive and active, is doing some rather definite work in the field of entertainment and of enlightenment and education.”<sup>186</sup>

Dana hesitated calling the Newark a ‘museum’ preferring instead to describe the ideal museum environment as being “an open workshop of delight and learning” and an “institute of visual instruction.”<sup>187</sup> His many special exhibitions stretched the boundaries of conventional display by featuring applied and industrial arts, textile and clay products manufactured by local firms, immigrant’s handicrafts and “inexpensive articles of good design.” Dana hoped that these exhibits would draw new visitors like housewives, workers, immigrants and others who might have a natural interest in the objects on display. More important to Dana than what was displayed, was how objects were used. He established new practices such as loaning objects to school classrooms, shops and

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<sup>186</sup> John Cotton Dana, *The New Museum: Selected Writings by John Cotton Dana*, edited by W.A. Peniston, Washington DC: The Newark Museum Association, New Jersey & The American Association of Museums, 1999.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.: 65.

hospitals; creating a teacher-training course at local colleges; opening a junior museum only for children and establishing branch museums in local libraries.<sup>188</sup>

Since Dana, the concept of the museum as an active learning environment has been explored by a number of educational theorists.<sup>189</sup> In 1936 Jean Piaget's developmental theory of learning in children moved the focus of learning from transmission and reception of knowledge to active construction of that knowledge.<sup>190</sup> A central component of Piaget's theory is that both elements involve the participation of the learner. Knowledge is not merely transmitted verbally but must be constructed and reconstructed by the learner. Piaget asserted that for a child to know and construct knowledge of the world, the child must act on those objects. The learner must be active, and is not a vessel to be filled with facts. Learning is seen as an active, as opposed to a passive process, that involves the learner interacting with their environment, with people, objects and events.

More recently, the work of experiential learning theorists have suggested that learners have different learning styles.<sup>191</sup> In 1984 David Kolb suggested that different types of learners have certain preferences in terms of learning style; accommodators (who prefer doing and feeling), divergers (who prefer feeling and watching), assimilators (who prefer watching and thinking) and convergers (who prefer thinking and doing). However, Kolb argues that, despite those preferences, several stages should be covered for the learning cycle to be complete; active experimentation (doing), concrete experience (feeling), reflective observation (watching) and abstract conceptualization (thinking).

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<sup>188</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997: 61.

<sup>189</sup> A helpful summary of the key learning theories is presented by J.A. Palmer (ed.) in *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present*, London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>190</sup> Leslie Smith, 'Jean Piaget 1896 - 1980' in J.A. Palmer (ed.), *Fifty Modern Thinkers on Education: From Piaget to the Present*, London: Routledge, 2001: 37 - 43.

<sup>191</sup> David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984.

In 1995 George Hein emphasised the active participation of the learner in making sense of their museum experience. He considers four learning approaches which have relevance to museums; Expository, Behaviourist, Constructivist and Discovery Learning. Both Expository and Discovery approaches are based on the premise that knowledge exists outside the learner. The expository approach views the learner simply as a vessel or warehouse to be filled with subject knowledge. The discovery learning approach is a more active one. It accepts the idea that learners change as they learn, that knowledge acts upon the learner to bring about changes in how their minds work, as they learn:-

“As people learn, their capacity to learn expands; the shape and volume of the mind’s warehouse is transformed by the process of grappling with the new information.”<sup>192</sup>

According to Hein, the meaning learners construct depends on their past experiences. He argues that a degree of constructivism is inevitable in human life because we all interpret nature and society differently depending on our personal experiences. A constructivist museum exhibition is likely to present content from a range of differing perspectives and to provide opportunities for learners to utilise their own life experiences in creating meaning. He describes a constructivist exhibition as one which includes “ways for learners to use both their hands and minds, to interact with the world, to manipulate it, to reach conclusions, experiment and increase their understanding...experiments are crucial for constructivist learning, whether in science or other subjects.”<sup>193</sup> In developing exhibitions, museums should therefore focus on the individual learner and not on subject matter, taking into account prior knowledge and understanding, to ensure that exhibitions are relevant to the lives of their target audiences.

Perhaps the most influential research has been the work of Howard Gardner’s whose theory of multiple intelligences, developed in 1983,

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<sup>192</sup> George Hein, ‘The Constructivist Museum’, *Journal of Education in Museums* 21: 23, 1995: 30.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.: 30.



promotes the notion that individuals think and learn in many different ways.<sup>194</sup> Gardner's theory proposes that there is not just one form of intelligence but several. He identifies seven human intelligences, or ways of thinking, that learners use to differing degrees to understand the world; linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, inter-personal and intra-personal. An individual's particular "mix" of intelligences determines the way they learn and consequently learning experiences need to be created that attend to all intelligences. Like Dana before him, Gardner advocates the idea of the museum as a more open learning environment than the controlled situation of the classroom. He recommends that museums should use a wide range of interpretive approaches that use all the senses, in order to cater for different ways of learning.<sup>195</sup>

This focus on the visitor experience in the context of the museum was key to John Falk and Lynn Dierking's research during the 1990s.<sup>196</sup> They developed a "Contextual Model of Learning" which grew out of an earlier framework developed in 1992, by tracking thousands of people throughout their museum visits, observing them in specific exhibitions and conducting numerous interviews. This model suggests that three overlapping contexts, "the personal, the sociocultural and the physical", contribute to and influence the interactions and experiences that people have when engaging in free-choice learning activities such as visiting museums. The experience, and any free-choice learning that results, is influenced by the interactions between these three contexts. Falk devised five categories of "identity lenses" that characterise personal museum going motivations. Museum visitors may see themselves as "explorers, facilitators, professionals / hobbyists, experience seekers, rechargers, respectful

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<sup>194</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

<sup>195</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

<sup>196</sup> John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (eds.), *The Museum Experience Revisited*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

pilgrims or affinity seekers” and these various identities colour and characterise their museum experience. The explorer is motivated by personal curiosity; the facilitator is motivated by other people and derives satisfaction from that of their guests such as parents or family groupings; the experience seeker desires to see and experience the place or setting of the museum and is motivated by the reputation of the museum; the professional / hobbyist is motivated by specific knowledge-related goals and the recharger is motivated by a contemplative or restorative visit.

A concept that expands on Falk and Dierking’s research and which has particular relevance to the design exhibition is psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s investigations of “optimal experience”. His research revealed that what makes an experience genuinely satisfying is a state of consciousness called “flow”. During flow, visitors typically experience deep enjoyment, creativity and a total involvement with life. The concept of “flow” is a common experiential state described as “a state of mind that is spontaneous, almost automatic, like the flow of a strong current.”<sup>197</sup> In this state, learning and satisfaction are optimised. In a museum environment, while interest and curiosity may first attract a museum visitor to an exhibit, the interaction with the exhibit needs to engage the visitor sufficiently for positive emotional or intellectual changes to occur. If a museum exhibit induces the “flow” experience, the experience will be intrinsically rewarding and consequently will grow in sensory, intellectual and emotional complexity. Csiksgentmihalyi concludes with an appeal for more museums to take a more experimental approach to their exhibits by becoming more active learning institutions.

The educational theories discussed have been particularly influential on the museum sector in helping curators and educators to understand visitor motivations and to tailor programmes accordingly. The impact can be seen in national initiatives set up in the 1990s. The Campaign for Learning (CFL) was set up in 1995 to conduct research, develop policies and

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<sup>197</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, New York: Harper & Row, 1996: 110 - 113.

campaigns to engage more people in learning. In 1997 David Anderson produced a report for the Department of National Heritage in which he argued for the important role of education:-

“Education is intrinsic to the nature of museums. Their educational mission drives every activity; it is an integral part of the work of all staff and an element informing the experience of every museum user. Unless museums make provision for education purposefully and with commitment, they are not truly museums.”<sup>198</sup>

In 2004 the Museums, Archives and Libraries Association (MLA) defined learning in the museum as a process of transformation engendered by a museum visit:-

“Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve the developing or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness, values, ideas and feelings, or an increase in the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more.”<sup>199</sup>

Curators and educators were increasingly recognising the importance of understanding how audiences learn in order to develop exhibitions and learning programmes that catered for a wide variety of educational needs. The theories also inspired a whole range of visitor studies and museums commissioned their own research in order to understand why people visit museums, what they do during their visit and what, if anything, they take away from their experience. Many museums initiated in-house evaluations of exhibitions and in many cases, commissioned external agencies to undertake audience research.<sup>200</sup> The results of such research were used to strengthen the museum’s offer but they also helped to identify under-represented visitors such as disenfranchised racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups, individuals with special needs, young adults

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<sup>198</sup> David Anderson, *A Common Wealth: Museums and learning in the United Kingdom*, Department of National Heritage, 1997.

<sup>199</sup> MLA, *Inspiring Learning for All*, London: Resource Publications, 2004: 1.

<sup>200</sup> A range of visitor research methods have been employed by museums to evaluate the impact of their programmes and to test out content and interpretation. These range from quantitative methods such as surveys, systematic tracking or observation to qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups or open observation.

and older visitors. Museums were able to assess the effectiveness of their offering by monitoring visitor's responses to permanent displays, exhibitions and services and identify audience preferences allowing them to more finely calibrate their activities, as Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler have observed:-

“Today, museums are not only reaching out to larger audiences and building demand among new groups, they are designing proactively the arrangements, services and offerings which will generate satisfaction and positive outcomes for their visitors.”<sup>201</sup>

In 2009 the Design Museum commissioned the research agency, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM), to undertake research to identify and explore attitudes to the Design Museum amongst “general gallery goers” who had not yet visited the museum. The intention was to explore brand perceptions of the Design Museum and particularly to investigate why people didn't visit. The research was also intended to test initial responses to the proposed move of the Design Museum to a new location and to look at the potential impact on perceptions and visiting.

MHM is the largest cultural strategy and research agency in the UK which has, over many years, conducted research exploring the reasons why people visit museums. Their research has shown that visitor motivations can be broken down into four main reasons; “educational, social, spiritual and emotional”. The dominant reason varies from visitor to visitor but all are almost there in one proportion or another. MHM's previous research suggests that traditionally museums have been willing to respond to the need to educate their visitors but have been less comfortable satisfying the other three motivations; social, spiritual and emotional.

MHM devised an online survey for the Design Museum which was emailed to over four thousand people, preselected by MHM, who had visited a London museum, gallery or cultural venue in the previous two years. The final report, *The View from Outside*, provides a range of fascinating data but the most interesting outcome highlights the fact that visitors to

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<sup>201</sup> Kotler and Kotler cited in David Anderson, *A Common Wealth: Museums in the Learning Age*, London: DCMS: 167.

museums were highly motivated, looking for a compelling proposition and wanted their visit to fulfil emotional and spiritual needs. When respondents were asked what they wanted to get from their visit, the highest percentage response was for the need for intellectual stimulation (54%: “Improve my own knowledge and understanding”; “Gain a deeper insight into a subject”; “Encourage children’s interests”). This was followed by a clear need for emotional stimulation (23%: “Experience awe-inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things or places”; “Be moved emotionally”; “Feel a strong sense of personal connection”; “Travel back in time”). Registering a lower percentage score was the need for spiritual drivers (17%: “Reflect and contemplate”; “Escape or recharge my batteries”; “Stimulate my own creativity”) and social (6%: “Spend time with other people in a nice place”; “Use facilities such as the shop, cafe, restaurant”).<sup>202</sup>

The results of the research communicated that visitors were actively seeking out opportunities to visit museums and galleries in order to meet their needs for intellectual stimulation and emotional connection. Special exhibitions were a key driver in deciding to make a visit. The results suggested that, whilst the location of the building or ticket price is a factor in deciding whether to visit, the compelling reason to visit was the exhibition; “a powerfully attractive exhibition will draw visitors over perceived barriers such as distance or cost if it is strong enough”. Exhibitions with a relatively broad appeal and interpretation suitable for non-specialists with hooks around wider popular culture and an immersive and fun visitor experience were emphasised. The report also recommended that museums develop alternative approaches to marketing, that focused less on the profile or significance of the designer or movement, and more on the benefits that a visit will deliver to visitors and points of connection with their existing knowledge. There was a clear demand for more “down-to-earth” exhibitions that provide an introductory route into fascinating subjects. The authors of the report were keen to

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<sup>202</sup> Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *The View from Outside: How visitors to other London museums and galleries see the Design Museum*, October 2009: 7.

emphasise that this was not a plea to “dumb down” content, but rather “to provide visitors with context and tools to help them appreciate the messages of the exhibition.”<sup>203</sup>

The results of the MHM research changed the way in which the museum viewed its audience and informed new programming and curatorial approaches. A comprehensive audience development strategy was developed that identified eight target audience segments, each characterised by their personal interests and motivations for visiting the museum. The information helped curators, educators and the communications team at the museum to tailor their programmes to more precisely meet the needs of these different groups.<sup>204</sup>



**Fig. 17:** Audience segmentation profile from the Design Museum Audience Development Strategy produced by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2009-10.

<sup>203</sup> Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *The View from Outside: How visitors to other London museums and galleries see the Design Museum*, October 2009: 28.

<sup>204</sup> Presentation by Matteo Plachesi, Head of Marketing and Communications, the Design Museum, to MA CCD students at the Design Museum, 17 October 2018.

As a result of this general shift in museums engaging more directly with their audiences, curators began to work more closely with education and marketing teams within institutions. Museum educators now actively contributed to exhibition development, organised events programmes, wrote education materials and provided outreach activities. In 2011 Helen Charman, a former Director of Learning and Research at the Design Museum, London, examined the reasons for this new focus in her PhD thesis, *The Productive Eye: Conceptual Learning in the Design Museum*.<sup>205</sup> Charman noted a visible shift in the way museums viewed education with the integration of curating and education beginning to change the nature of museum work. She observed how the traditional education model, which had perceived the visitor as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, had now shifted to a position that advocated a process of active engagement with experience. This had the effect of instigating a change in the visitor and a desire to learn more.

There was also a conscious shift in the language used by museums that moved away from 'Education' to 'Learning' which emphasised the learner over the teacher. Education departments were renamed as Learning, Learning and Interpretation, and in some cases, Participation, as Nina Simon later commented:-

“Museums now think of themselves as sites of knowledge exchange, places geared up for active engagements - the keyword is participation.”<sup>206</sup>

Simon's observation derived from her study, *The Participatory Museum*, in which she offers fresh thinking as to how cultural institutions can become more dynamic, relevant and essential places. Her central argument advocates that curators should focus on creating participatory, dynamic, audience-centred museum spaces. In Simon's view, the cultural sector had reached a critical point where many professionals believed in the 'why'

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<sup>205</sup> Helen Charman, *The Productive Eye: Conceptualising Learning in the Design Museum*, Institute of Education, University of London, 2011.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Nina Simon, 'The Participatory Museum', *Museum Identity*, 2010: 36-40.

of participation but needed good resources on the 'how'. Drawing on her background as a designer, she examined and shared the range of techniques for visitor participation available to the curator and the ways in which those techniques could impact on the visitor experience and the outcome of a museum visit as she said, "what matters to me is that professionals pick design techniques that suit their mission statements... producing a high-quality museum experience for everyone."<sup>207</sup>

This new emphasis on participatory learning in museums impacted on the way in which the Design Museum approached its learning remit. In 2009 the education department was renamed as the "Learning" team and expanded its programmes, and the team required to deliver the programmes. Increasingly, educators worked more closely with curators to understand the role of learning within a museum context, and the aspects that constitute an effective learning experience. The results of this shift influenced new curatorial approaches in developing exhibitions that were able to respond to a range of learning styles. It also prompted new ways of working. Project teams were set up by the curator for each new exhibition which opened up to other areas of expertise in the museum. The teams included a representative from Learning, Communications, Development, Front of House (which was later renamed as Visitor Experience), Finance, Retail and Publishing to ensure that every aspect of the visitor experience was considered and maximised.

As Charman points out in her PhD thesis, this move reflected a broader museological shift towards a strategy that understands learning as bringing together both the intellectual (prescribed content knowledge within a formal curricula) and affective faculties (emotions and feelings) as modes of cognition. It also presented the museum less as a singular authority on its subject, and more as a catalyst or hub for discursive, critical engagement with design, both with the general public and the

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<sup>207</sup> Nina Simon, 'The Participatory Museum', *Museum Identity* Interview, 2010, 36-40.



design community.<sup>208</sup> This increased focus by the Design Museum on the interests and motivations of its audiences had a further outcome in terms of the introduction of a new strand to the learning programme designed to engage with an adult audience; the Public Programme.

### **2.3 Producing New Curatorial Formats: The Public Programme Curator**

During the late 1990s and 2000s a proliferation of curator-centred publications and international curating conferences sparked debates about an increasingly expanding field of practice. In 2007 Paul O'Neill first used the term "curatorial turn" to describe these shifts. In his study, *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*, O'Neill undertook a mapping of various issues in approaches to contemporary curating and their implications for the reception of contemporary art where the impetus is increasingly on the process rather than on object-based artwork.<sup>209</sup> He presents a short history of contemporary curating by examining some of the issues that had emerged in curatorial discourse over the previous ten years, including the rise of "biennial culture", the expansion of the artist as a meta-curator or "creative-auteur" and the large-scale curated exhibition. The issues identified by O'Neill are all relevant to the development of contemporary design and the developing role of the design curator.

O'Neill's argument focuses on a shift from the primacy of the artist to that of the curator in line with what he identifies as a shift in the curator's role. No longer seen as the carers of institutional collections, curators would instead become the authors of a more critically engaged and experimental form of exhibition practice. As examples of this shifting practice, he cites the increasing number of global biennials and the rise of the nomadic curator disconnected to any specific institution. In 1997 curator and critic, Michael Brenson had identified this shift as the "curator's moment" when

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<sup>208</sup> Helen Charman, *The Productive Eye: Conceptualising Learning in the Design Museum*, Institute of Education, University of London 2011: 41.

<sup>209</sup> Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse' in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.), Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007.

certain individual curators started to achieve an unprecedented visibility.<sup>210</sup> In 2008 curator and theorist, Irit Rogoff described the new type of curator as a “jet-set flaneur.”<sup>211</sup>

As part of this shift, O'Neill identified an increasing proliferation in discursive practices such as discussions, lecture programmes, conferences, publications and events as a recurrent and integral part of exhibitions, many taking place outside the existing traditional educational and institutional structures.<sup>212</sup> These discursive interventions have now become central to contemporary practice, reflecting part of a wider educational turn in curating. Alongside exhibitions and learning activities, the public programme is now considered an integral part of a museum's offering. Historically, these events had been peripheral to the exhibition playing a supporting role. In an essay written in 2009, 'Experiments in Integrated Programming', Sally Tallant, Director of the Liverpool Biennial, argued that today's institutions should place an equal emphasis on public programming as they do on exhibitions.<sup>213</sup> Tallant was Head of Programmes at the Serpentine Galleries between 2001 and 2011. In the essay, she comments on how education, learning and public programmes were often seen as secondary to, or servicing, exhibitions. The programme had less importance to that of the exhibition, thus the public programme curator was viewed as less important to the exhibitions curator. She argues that the “new institution” should have equal emphasis on all programmes, such as talks and events as well as exhibitions. Public programming should be integrated into the exhibition-making process, as opposed to departmentalising each area of work.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Michael Brenson, 'The Curator's Moment: Trends in the Field of International Contemporary Art Exhibitions', *Art Journal* 57, no. 4, Winter 1998: 16.

<sup>211</sup> Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *e-flux journal*, 1, 2008: E1-E10.

<sup>212</sup> Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse' in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.), Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007:13-28.

<sup>213</sup> Sally Tallant, 'Experiments in Integrated Programming', Tate papers (Tate's online research journal), 2009: 1-6. Available at <https://www.tate.org.uk>. (Accessed 15.07.16).

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*: 2.

In line with a shift in focus by museums on the interests and motivations of their audiences, public programming can now be defined as a curatorial practice common to most museums. Exhibitions are the content generators raising key issues and debates and the public programme provides a platform for discussion and debate. The public programme provides different modes of engagement with design practice and practitioners can include workshops, salons, talks, panel discussions, symposia, conferences and festivals. These discursive platforms have generated new audiences for museums and, in turn, created new roles for the curator.

A range of innovative programming at a number of London-based institutions has done much to elevate the standing of the public programme. In 2005 curator Hans Ulrich Obrist initiated the Marathon at the Serpentine Gallery to provide a discursive space in which to debate areas of contemporary practice. Over an intensive programming period of twenty-four hours, specialist audiences come together to take part in a programme that oscillates between live talks, film screenings, performances and panel discussions. The focus changes every year to reflect research that defines the year and past themes have included transformations, memory, gardens, maps, extinction and artificial intelligence. The formats can be written, spoken or performed and include up to fifty practitioners with architects, anthropologists, scientists, politicians and poets contributing to the debates.<sup>215</sup>

Lucia Pietroiusti, Curator of Public Programmes at the Serpentine Gallery, has commented on how the public programme has provided a more discursive space in which to debate areas of contemporary practice. It has also achieved a more holistic approach to programming in museums and a more integrated environment with exhibitions and learning teams working

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<sup>215</sup> The Serpentine's Annual Festival of Ideas, Serpentine Galleries website. Available at: <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/explore/marathon> (Accessed 15.11.17).

much more closely together.<sup>216</sup>



**Fig. 18:** The first Marathon at the Serpentine Gallery, 28 July 6pm - 29 July 6pm 2006.

The public programme is now a regular part of programming at a number of institutions. The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) delivers a programme of talks, performances and events inviting international theorists, designers, academics, philosophers and poets to contribute.<sup>217</sup> RIBA Public Programmes comprise “engaging and thought-provoking public-facing talks, events and displays for both a specialist audience and the broader public.” Events are programmed alongside the major exhibition seasons and themed programmes encourage public engagement with architects and architecture.<sup>218</sup> The Architectural Association’s (AA) public programme consists of an extensive series of public events dedicated to contemporary architectural culture such as

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<sup>216</sup> Presentation by Lucia Pietroiusti, Curator of Public Programmes at the Serpentine Gallery, to MA CCD students at the Design Museum, 21 November 2017.

<sup>217</sup> The Institute of Contemporary Arts website. Available at: <https://www.ica.art> (Accessed 15.11.17).

<sup>218</sup> RIBA Website. Available at: <https://www.architecture.com/whats-on> (Accessed 15.11.17).

exhibitions, members' events, lectures, seminars, conferences, book launches and publications. Each year architectural theorists and practitioners, writers, performing artists, musicians and art historians are invited to contribute to the programme.<sup>219</sup>

The Design Museum recruited its first public programme curator in 2017. Historically this activity had been managed by the learning team with a programme that consisted largely of talks given by designers featured in the exhibitions. The Design Museum's public programme was designed to be an autonomous programme that brought together different voices to discuss the nature and role of design practice. Sumitra Upham is Curator of Public Programmes at the Design Museum, and a graduate of the MA programme in Curating Contemporary Design delivered with Kingston University. She has described her role as to work closely with exhibition curators to think about design in new and unexpected ways. She views the public programme as an extension of the exhibitions, extending content outside the exhibition through a talk or an intervention in the gallery space. The programme is an important means of generating research, promoting new ideas and examples of new work and practice.<sup>220</sup>

A further highly popular strand of public programming has been the evening and night-time events known as Lates which have become a feature of UK museums and galleries. The initiative derived from a decision taken by the Royal Academy (RA) in 1999 to open round-the-clock on a single day only on the occasion of its exhibition, *Monet in the 20th Century*. The RA became the first British gallery to open for twenty-four hours. In 2001 the V&A started their Friday Lates programme and in 2005 other national museums followed suit and developed after-hours programming under the banner of *Museums at Night*, a

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<sup>219</sup> Architectural Association website. Available at: <https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/PUBLIC/WHATSON/whatson.php> (Accessed 15.11.17).

<sup>220</sup> Presentation by Sumitra Upham, Curator of Public Programmes at the Design Museum, to MA CCD students at the Design Museum, 14 November 2017.

nation-wide festival forming part of the Campaign for Museums' Museums and Galleries Month.<sup>221</sup>

The V&A Lates, originally curated by the V&A contemporary team, are designed to celebrate all aspects of contemporary visual culture and design in society, engaging audiences with leading and emerging artists and designers through live performance, film, installation, debate, DJs and late-night exhibition openings. The Lates are designed to provide something different to a daytime visit. A shared social experience and an element of theatrical experience mark out a successful after-hours event in a museum or gallery.



**Fig. 19:** *Made in India*, Friday Late at the V&A, 27 November 2015.

A report commissioned in 2018 by the Arts Council into the role of UK museum Lates highlighted them as a distinct strand of museum practice. The research demonstrated how the events enabled museums and galleries to reach untapped demand, creating new and increased income streams and attracting new audiences into their spaces. The report

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<sup>221</sup> See Museums at Night, Available at: <http://museumsatnight.org.uk> (Accessed 7.09.18).

suggested that they offered an alternative to the blockbuster, high impact, large scale loan exhibitions which could be difficult to get into and which were often criticised for being overcrowded. Late events can be viewed as a more accessible, social, experiential and affordable alternative or complement to visiting an exhibition. As the report authors claim; “Over the next fifteen years, if the sector is supported, it could be as normal to walk through the doors of a museum at night as it is to enter a theatre.”<sup>222</sup>

## 2.4 The Experiential Turn in Museums

As museums responded to new pressures in the sector to attract visitors and generate income they started to look towards their competition. During the early 2000s the cultural sector was influenced by a more general shift towards an experience economy as a way to attract, engage and retain customers. The experience economy is a theory that underpins the understanding of customer experience. Although the concept was initially focused on business, it has crossed into many other areas including retail, leisure and the cultural sector.

The term was first proposed by a Harvard business text published in 2011, *The Experience Economy*, in which the authors B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore explore how today’s economy has developed from one based on the exchange of goods and services to one that is driven by the exchange of experiences:-

“So let us be most clear: goods and service are no longer enough to foster economic growth, create new jobs, and maintain economic prosperity. To realise revenue growth and increased employment, the staging of experiences must be pursued as a distinct form of economic output. Indeed, in a world saturated with largely undifferentiated goods and services the greatest opportunity for value creation resides in staging experiences.”<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> *A Culture of Lates*, Report commissioned by the Arts Council England and Culture24, 2018: 2.

<sup>223</sup> Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011: ix.

For Pine and Gilmore, consumers are attracted not only by the goods sold but also by the store experience. Providers of services are under increasing pressure to stage compelling experiences in order to guide vital transformations for their customers. Businesses now compete not only on the quality of their products and services, but on the quality of experiences their brand can offer. Crucially, an experience needs to be memorable. Pine and Gilmore's suggestion of two dimensions of the experience are particularly interesting; those of "customer participation" and "connection" which encompass both absorption and immersion:-

"When a person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities...but when he purchases an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages - as in a theatrical play - to engage him in a personal way."<sup>224</sup>

Pine and Gilmore suggest that there are many examples of "staged experiences" in the entertainment industry. Staging an experience is not simply about entertaining a customer but about engaging them. An experience may engage on any number of dimensions from passive to active. The authors offer a model of "experience realms", which they list as entertainment, education, escape and aestheticism. All are mutually compatible domains that often merge to perform uniquely personal encounters. The authors employ two scales to construct them; Participation, a scale from passive (someone watching a performance) to active (someone involved in constructing their experience). Connection is a scale from absorption (the experience is brought into the person's mind, occupying their attention) to immersion (physically becoming part of the experience). The emphasis is placed on engagement which occurs whenever an experience connects with an individual in "a personal and memorable way". A combination of all four dimensions is seen to achieve optimum engagement.

Pine and Gilmore interpret the exhibition as having the potential to offer all four experience realms, allowing a connection with the visitor on both an

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<sup>224</sup> Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011.



intellectual and emotional level.<sup>225</sup> Pine and Gilmore's research reveals that this idea has been circulating since the 1950s with the proliferation of theme parks and experience-centred initiatives such as Disneyland which they cite as an example of an orchestrated and staged customer experience.<sup>226</sup>

Pine and Gilmore's research has implications for the contemporary museum and, in many ways, reflect changes to the way in which exhibitions were conceived and presented during the 2000s. In an era where culture is consumed by a wider public than ever before, and when museums are competing for their audiences with other experience realms, they are no longer perceived as merely repositories for objects but as active sites of experience. In 1994, educational theorist, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill identified this shift when she suggested that a new role had to be found for museums as they entered a new and rapidly growing world, that of the leisure and tourism industry dedicated to pleasure and consumerism. In a series of studies about the changing relationship between museums and their audiences, Hooper-Greenhill argued that, with the development of a very varied and professional leisure industry, it was possible to re-articulate a purpose for museums and galleries:-

“If museums are now clearly placed within the leisure industry, the public sees the form of leisure that museums represent as closely connected to learning, and linked to worthwhile and valuable experiences rather than trivial short-term thrills.”<sup>227</sup>

She identifies that there is a clear and consistent demand for a close and active encounter with objects and exhibits and a physical experience using all the senses. At a time when companies could no longer rely on competing simply on the quality of their products and services, they also had to compete on the quality of the experiences they offered to their

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<sup>225</sup> Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2011: x.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.: x.

<sup>227</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994: 2.

customers. Consumers were understood to desire explicitly designed and promoted experiences, the more memorable the better. This concept filtered down to the museum experience which started to offer a new kind of encounter, in which visitors were exposed to highly designed encounters, often incorporating performative and theatrical presentations.

During the 2000s, a number of exhibitions and installations at museums and galleries were notable in the way they created experiences which often brought the exhibition closer to a piece of immersive theatre. In 2004 the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, London was transformed into a public space in which artist Olafur Eliasson presented an installation that created an extraordinary optical illusion. *The Weather Project* was the fourth in a series of commissions for the Hall by Unilever. It took the subject of the weather as the basis for exploring ideas about experience, mediation and representation. At one end of the hall was fixed a vast, semicircular disc made up of hundreds of mono-frequency lamps, with yellow and black as the only colours visible. This form was reflected upwards in hundreds of small mirrors that were hung from the ceiling to give the impression of an entire sphere of extraordinary luminosity. Each mirror was offset fractionally so that the upper edges of the form appeared blurred, tricking the eye into thinking that the effect was related to the light or the heat. The boundary between real and fictive space was further eroded by means of a fine mist that permeated the space, which seemed to be seeping in from the nearby River Thames. As visitors wandered through the space, they sat or lay down flat on the floor, either alone or with friends, in order to engage more fully with the experience.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> 'The Unilever Series: Olafur Eliasson: The Weather Project', Tate website. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series/unilever-series-olafur-eliasson-weather-project> (Accessed 20.07.11).



**Fig. 20:** *The Weather Project*: Olafur Eliasson at Tate Modern, London, 16 October - 21 March 2004. The installation viewed from the ground level of the Turbine Hall.

In 2012, *Rain Room* at the Barbican Centre, London offered visitors a similar weather-related experience, a simulation of real rainfall. The exhibition was created by Hannes Koch, Florian Ortkrass and Stuart Wood, three design graduates from the Royal College of Art, London who went on to establish their own design studio, 'Random International.' In the Barbican's exhibition space, 'The Curve', viewers of the exhibition walked through a one hundred square metre space of pouring rainfall, that operated through a digital simulation of the sounds, humidity and visual experience of rainfall, but without getting wet - the installation's sensors shut off flow when they detected bodies below them. The audience's response becomes a crucial part of the installation, as the rainfall responded to their reactions through motorised mirrors, and the audience becomes the subject of the artwork.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> 'Rain Room, Random International', Barbican website. Available at: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/rain-room-random-international> (Accessed 20.07.11).



**Fig. 21:** *Rain Room*: Random International at The Curve, Barbican, London, 4 October 2012 - 3 March 2013.

The exhibition prompted unprecedented interest from the media with one critic describing it as an example of “how the role of digital technology is taking audience participation, response and interaction to the next level within the world of art.”<sup>230</sup> *Rain Room* had a powerful social media presence, with more than 30,000 images and videos posted to Instagram with the hashtag #rainroom. The exhibition subsequently toured to New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where tickets completely sold out.

In an article in *Art Forum* in 2013 Felicity Scott, Professor of Art and Architecture History at Columbia University, suggested that the popularity of *Rain Room* was due to its ability to “harness and reflect contemporary desire for seemingly direct ‘participation’ and spectacular forms of

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<sup>230</sup> Lucia Ruggiero, ‘Rain Room at London’s Barbican’, in *Digital Meets Culture*, 2012. Available at: <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/article/rain-room-at-londons-barbican> (Accessed 20.10.12).

exposure.”<sup>231</sup> Other commentators also noted this shift towards accessibility and questioned whether smartphone photography was getting in the way of people looking and thinking about the art in front of them. Philip Kennicott, art critic for *The Washington Post* commented that such exhibitions invite visitors to treat them superficially because they are looking at the art through their phones rather than focusing on conscious, in-person deliberation. Ken Johnson of *The New York Times*, writing in 2013, remarked that *Rain Room* seems “little more than a gimmicky diversion.”<sup>232</sup>

Installations like *The Weather Project* and *Rain Room* support the view that increasingly exhibitions that encompass spectacular, immersive experiences are changing the museum experience, by offering a communal experience and a personal one. They translate into immediate photo opportunities on social media and it has been suggested that taking photographs of artworks and uploading to Instagram or Snapchat can be interpreted as a way for people to want to share what is important and meaningful to them.<sup>233</sup> As the earlier discussion relating to learning theories explained (2.2), different people will achieve their most meaningful experience in a museum in various ways and social media can attract people who might otherwise rarely set foot inside a museum. The installations are also examples of exhibitions that are participatory in the sense that, through sound and movement, visitors are able to engage more closely with an artwork. They also show how the conditions of a given space provide the impetus for creating immersive experiences.

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<sup>231</sup> Felicity Scott, ‘Limits of Control: Rain Room and Immersive Environments’, *Art Forum*, September 2013. Available at: <https://www.artforum.com/print/201307/limits-of-control-rain-room-and-immersive-environments-42636> (Accessed 20.11.13).

<sup>232</sup> Philip Kennicott, ‘Newly scrubbed Renwick Gallery opens Friday’, *The Washington Post*, 12 November 2015. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/newly-scrubbed-renwick-gallery-opens-friday/2015/11/12/cd486116-88ad-11e5-9a07-453018f9a0ec\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e86303ddf1c8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/newly-scrubbed-renwick-gallery-opens-friday/2015/11/12/cd486116-88ad-11e5-9a07-453018f9a0ec_story.html?utm_term=.e86303ddf1c8) (Accessed 15.12.15).

<sup>233</sup> Ken Johnson, ‘The Natural World: Here, It’s Had Work’, *The New York Times*, 30 May 2013. Available at: [https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/31/arts/design/expo-1-new-york-at-moma-ps1-and-other-sites.html?\\_r=0&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&gwh=C7AC2C06E3A37CB3C93C568F5C7CFA66&gwt=pay](https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/31/arts/design/expo-1-new-york-at-moma-ps1-and-other-sites.html?_r=0&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&gwh=C7AC2C06E3A37CB3C93C568F5C7CFA66&gwt=pay) (Accessed 15.12.15).

In 2010 an exhibition on the work of British architect and designer John Pawson opened at the Design Museum, London. *John Pawson: Plain Space* (22 September 2010 - 30 January 2011) celebrated Pawson's career with models, film, photographs and architectural elements relating to some of his most important projects including the Cistercian Monastery of Our Lady of Nový Dvůr in the Czech Republic, the Sackler Crossing at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Calvin Klein store on Madison Avenue, New York. Often described as a 'minimalist', Pawson is known for a rigorous process of reduction that creates designs of simplicity, grace and visual clarity.<sup>234</sup> As well as the more conventional curated content of an architectural show, the design incorporated subtle changes to the gallery space itself to create an overall atmosphere that communicated Pawson's aesthetic. In an interview for *Dezeen* shortly before the opening of the exhibition, Pawson said, "through the exhibition the viewer will get an in-depth look at my design process - from sketches and study models right through to a full scale installation." At the heart of the exhibition was a site-specific 1:1 full-sized installation designed by Pawson which offered a direct 'experience' of his work, the first such installation at the museum.<sup>235</sup>



**Fig. 22:** 1:1 installation in *John Pawson: Plain Space* at the Design Museum, 22 September 2010 - 30 January 2011. Curated by Gemma Curtin. Exhibition design: John Pawson architects.

<sup>234</sup> Design Museum website. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/designers/john-pawson> (Accessed 15.12.15).

<sup>235</sup> Rose Etherington, 'John Pawson: Plain Space at the Design Museum', *Dezeen*, 16 September 2010. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/designers/john-pawson> (Accessed 15.12.15).

The exhibition attracted positive reviews and praise for the way in which the museum had attempted to solve the perennial problem of exhibiting architecture in a museum. But for one reviewer the installation, consisting of a blank white space with a barrel-vaulted ceiling fell short; “Its gauzy diffused light creates a cone of silence for introspection, but that falls apart when you sit on the benches. What are we supposed to do here? Stare at the person opposite you? Stare at the ground?”<sup>236</sup>

These new interventions in the museum and gallery space represent a new approach to curating exhibitions. Art critic, Boris Groys has discussed how art installations can be interpreted as Gesamtkunstwerks that are experienced only from within. The term, ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ meaning a total work of art, was first introduced by the German composer, Richard Wagner in 1849.<sup>237</sup> As Groys comments, this idea can be applied to the experience of being within an installation that “erases the border between stage and audience.” It transforms the viewer from being the “viewer” to being a part of the installation itself. The viewer experiences the piece from within, rather than experiencing the piece from the outside looking in.<sup>238</sup> The new interventions also reference a cultural shift by museums towards an experience economy as a way to attract, engage and retain their visitors as a way to reach new audiences. As Lisa Roberts has argued, they represent the notion that entertainment is not simply a stepping stone to education but a progenitor of the receptive state required for authentic learning to occur.<sup>239</sup> The curator is constructing visitor experiences that promote engagement and which generate personal connections between visitors and the content of an exhibition.

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<sup>236</sup> Jennifer Kabat, ‘Reviews: John Pawson’, *Frieze*, 1 January 2011. Available at: <https://frieze.com/article/john-pawson> (Accessed 15.12.15).

<sup>237</sup> Boris Groys, ‘Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk’, *e-flux Journal* 50, December 2013.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.: Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59974/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/> (Accessed 15.12.15)

<sup>239</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997: 79.

## 2.5 Narrative Environments

The previous section (2.4) has explored how curators have sought to understand how visitors learn in exhibitions and applied this understanding to construct appropriate visitor experiences. A number of museum theorists have suggested using the framework of a narrative approach as a way to enhance the ways in which visitors engage with spaces, concepts and objects.<sup>240</sup> The idea has become a powerful and persistent idea for many curators working in museums and has influenced my own approach to curating, to be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

In her study, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, published in 1997 Lisa Roberts explores how museum educators have become central figures in shaping exhibitions and displays. They construct narratives based less on explaining objects and more on interpreting objects which are determined as much by what is meaningful to the visitor as by the curatorial intention. Roberts discusses museum education in relation to entertainment, which in her view can be understood as “a tool of empowerment, as a shaper of experience and as an ethical responsibility.”<sup>241</sup>

This approach derives from a simple idea that humans are natural storytellers. Psychologist and educator, Jerome Bruner, has argued that since ancient times, humans have used stories that represent an event or series of events as ways to learn.<sup>242</sup> He suggests that humans employ two modes of thought each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience and constructing reality; paradigmatic (or logico-scientific) and narrative.

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<sup>240</sup> Key texts include; Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press; Suzanne Macleod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (eds.), *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 2012; John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2000.

<sup>241</sup> Lisa C. Roberts, *From Knowledge to Narrative: Educators and the Changing Museum*, Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997: 79.

<sup>242</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1986: 11-14.



He recognises imaginative narrative as leading to “good stories, gripping drama and believable historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course, and strives to locate the experience in time and place.”<sup>243</sup>

Philosopher and literary theorist, Roland Barthes suggests that stories are an integral part of our experience as human beings. For Barthes, narrative “is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narratives; all classes, all human groups have their stories...”<sup>244</sup>

A number of museum theorists have identified this idea in museums. In *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, Laura Hourston Hanks, Jonathan Hale and Suzanne Macleod argue that what unites many curators approaches is an attempt to create what might be called “narrative environments”, experiences which integrate objects, spaces and stories of people and places as part of a process of storytelling that speaks of the experience of everyday and a sense of self:-

“Whereas storytelling in literature is determined and confined by the linear arrangement of text on a page; in cinema to visual images on a screen; and in traditional theatre to the static audience with its singular perspective, the museum represents a fully embodied experience of objects and media in three-dimensional space, unfolding in a potentially free-flowing temporal sequence.”<sup>245</sup>

In the years leading up to the millennium, museum professionals debated trends in exhibition design and spoke increasingly of the need to contextualise the objects on display for visitors. In 2001 museum consultant Leslie Bedford advocated narrative as a powerful way for

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<sup>243</sup> Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1986: 11-14.

<sup>244</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative’, *New Literary History* 6, no. 2, 1975: 237.

<sup>245</sup> Suzanne Macleod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (eds.), *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 2012. xxi.

museums to engage their visitors, proposing that storytelling is the “real work” of museums. Bedford examined the ways in which the narrative or story form can generate personal connections between visitors and content. Through a discussion of case studies of exhibitions, public programmes and outreach to schools, she argues that stories aid humans in defining their values and beliefs and allow the visitor to make connections between museum artefacts and their own lives and memories:-

“Stories are the most fundamental way we learn. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. They teach without preaching, encouraging both personal reflection and public discussion. Stories inspire wonder and awe; they allow a listener to imagine another time and place, to find the universal in the particular, and to feel empathy for others. They preserve individual and collective memory and speak to both the adult and the child.”<sup>246</sup>

Bedford proposes that narratives are key to the process of memorising, retrieving and retelling knowledge. This is particularly important for the educative role of the museum as John Falk and Lynn Dierking also suggest; “universally, people mentally organise information effectively if it is recounted to them in a story or narrative form.”<sup>247</sup>

In 2004 Sue Allen, a former Director of Visitor Research and Evaluation at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, researched the use of narrative tools as ways for visitors to make meanings about science. Allen defined narrative in a museum context as taking the personal perspective involving a series of events; containing emotional content and authentic in origin, with someone telling the story. Allen also drew attention to the fact that the museum sector still does not clearly understand how narrative could be used to enhance visitor learning.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Leslie Bedford, ‘Storytelling: The Real Work of Museums’, *Curator*, 44(1), 2001: 33.

<sup>247</sup> John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2000: 51.

<sup>248</sup> Sue Allen, ‘Designs for Learning: Studying Science Museum Exhibits That Do More Than Entertain’, Published online in *Wiley InterScience*, 7 April 2004. Available at: [www.interscience.wiley.com](http://www.interscience.wiley.com) (Accessed 5.04.17).

The traditional image of museums as repositories of artefacts characterised by a linear, encyclopaedic display has gradually given way to a narrative structure devised by the curator with an exhibition designer brought in to create varied rhythms and levels of intensity. Art and media theorists, Anna-Sophie Springer and Boris Groys have likened the role of the curator to that of a cartographer. Like maps, curatorial projects are social constructions, “narrative spaces”, that shape our understanding of place and space. In Boris Groys’ view:-

“Every exhibition tells a story by directing the viewer through the exhibition in a particular order; the exhibition space is always a narrative space.”<sup>249</sup>

The concept of narrative has extended into the museum as an interpretation strategy and a means of creating links between the subject of an exhibition and the audience. As recent educational theories discussed in section 2.2 have served to highlight, while interest and curiosity may first attract a museum visitor to an exhibit, the interaction with the exhibit has to be intrinsically rewarding in order to enable positive emotional or intellectual changes to occur. For the design exhibition, the idea of narrative alludes to the power of stories as structured experiences unfolding in space and time in which visitors are encouraged to participate and construct their own learning. An interaction is structured around stories, rather than objects and the narrative is essential in the meaning-making, understanding and remembering of the messages, content and information presented. The exhibition can be perceived as a theatre with narrative potential, a site where space and objects merge to connect with human perception, imagination and memory.

Over the last two decades, a number of exhibitions have served to highlight the prominent idea of curating as a form of storytelling articulated

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<sup>249</sup> Boris Groys quoted in Anna-Sophie Springer, ‘The Museum as Archipelago’, *Scapegoat: Landscape, Architecture, Political Economy*, No. 05, Summer/Fall 2013: 247.

by a clear curatorial concept and themes or overarching narratives.<sup>250</sup>

These exhibitions, to be discussed in later sections, show how contemporary curating strategies use the exhibition environment as an interpretation tool. The exhibition is a setting for the staging of spatial relations between the work and the viewer. The curator creates structures and experiences that allow the viewer to engage with the work. Narrative can address the relationship between a single object and its setting in space or it can involve the creation of displays that build a background storyline to the objects on display. It creates a strong linking dialogue between the space and the visitor and can play an important part in the creation of powerful visitor experiences.

This approach would seem to support the views of former Tate Director, Nicholas Serota. Writing in 1987, he identified that the new museums of the future would seek to promote different modes and levels of interpretation by subtle juxtapositions of experience explored by visitors according to their particular interests and sensibilities, “in the new museum each of us, curators and viewers alike, will have to become more willing to chart our own path...rather than following a single path laid down by a curator.”<sup>251</sup>

## **2.6 Designing Exhibitions as Narrative Space**

The concept of narrative space has influenced a further area of design practice over the last decade, the field of exhibition design. David Dernie has identified how narrative has become central to exhibition design. In his view, the sector has become a varied, media-rich highly interpretive landscape where exhibitions engage with the clarity and persuasive techniques that once belonged to the world of advertising reaching out to a broader range of visitors:-

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<sup>250</sup> Examples include; *David Bowie Is...* at the V&A, London, 2013 and *Hussein Chalayan: From fashion and back* at the Design Museum, London, 2009. The exhibitions are discussed in Section 2.7.

<sup>251</sup> Nicholas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2000: 55.

“The emphasis on narrative space that has characterised modern exhibition practice has recently refocused, as museums and galleries respond to an increasingly sophisticated and competitive leisure market. What is now fundamental to contemporary exhibition design is the creation of an ‘experience’ that is engaging, multi-sensory and rewarding.”<sup>252</sup>

Many ideas have influenced the development of exhibition design as an essential component of curatorial practice. The intrinsic relationship between the curator and the exhibition designer can be understood as a legacy from the Bauhaus and the experimental approaches to exhibition design developed by designers such as Herbert Bayer (1900-1985) who was first a student and then a teacher of advertising, design and typography at the design school. Writing in 1937, Bayer accorded exhibition design a new status as a distinct discipline:-

“Exhibition design has evolved as a new discipline, as an apex of all media and powers of communication and of collective efforts and effects. The combined means of visual communication constitutes a remarkable complexity: language as visible printing or as sound, pictures as symbols, paintings and photographs, sculptural media, materials and surfaces, colour, light, movement, films, diagrams and charts. The total application of all plastic and psychological means makes exhibition design an intensified and new language.”<sup>253</sup>

He argued that every aspect of design, from graphic to lighting to interiors, should be brought to bear on an exhibition’s design and that the creation of a rich visual and physical relationship between the viewer and the works on display encouraged engagement. He argued that the theme should not retain its distance from the spectator, but that it should be brought close to him, to penetrate and leave an impression.

Bayer’s approach is cited as one of the foremost influences on the early years of temporary exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. Art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski argues that in the

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<sup>252</sup> David Dernie, *Exhibition Design*, London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2006: 13.

<sup>253</sup> Herbert Bayer, ‘Fundamentals of Exhibition Design’, *PM* 6, 2, December 1939 - January 1940: 17.

installation design of the first half of the twentieth century, the sources of such practices as viewer interactivity and site specificity alongside multimedia, electronic and installation-based work are to be found.<sup>254</sup> In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, Staniszewski asserts that visuality, display and narrative are central to any curated exhibition, with display understood as the core of exhibiting.<sup>255</sup> Staniszewski also emphasises the influential part played by artists, designers and curators such as Alfred H. Barr, Herbert Bayer, Frederick Kiesler, László Moholy-Nagy and William Sandberg in contributing to this discipline.

The work of American mid-twentieth century designers Charles and Ray Eames in the field of exhibition design and media presentation provides a good basis from which to explore these principles of curatorial practice.<sup>256</sup> Best known for their development of new techniques in furniture production, architecture and industrial design, the Eames achieved an incredibly diverse output throughout their careers spanning fields such as photography, filmmaking, exhibition design and multi-media work. Exhibitions such as *Mathematica: A World of Numbers* (1961) presented an engaging exploration of mathematical concepts through an interactive exhibition. Sponsored by IBM, it included five short animations and can be viewed as pioneering interactive formats later adopted by science and technology museums.

More recently, Curator Zoë Ryan has singled out exhibitions at the

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<sup>254</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A history of exhibition installation at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998: xxii-xxiii.

<sup>255</sup> Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A history of exhibition installation at the Museum of Modern Art*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998: xxi.

<sup>256</sup> Key academic texts on the Eames as designers and curators include; Catherine Ince, *The World of Charles and Ray Eames*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2015; Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995; Donald Albrecht, *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention*, New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1998.

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) such as *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (1932) and *Machine Art* (1934) where each of the installation designs were particularly influential with display methods conceived to engage and provoke the visitor. The exhibition design for *Machine Art*, discussed in Chapter 1 (1.3), was very carefully conceived by curator Philip Johnson. A press release for the show explicitly stated that, for the first time, the Museum was giving as much importance to the installation as to the exhibition itself.<sup>257</sup>

Over the last two decades, museums have changed the way in which they communicate with their visitors through an increasingly diverse range of interpretive tools. Many writers have documented the shift away from curating as an administrative, caring, mediating activity towards that of curating as a creative activity more akin to a form of artistic practice. Jonathan Watkins has argued for curating as a form of artistic practice. He suggested that, in curated exhibitions, the display or exhibition is aided by the curator's "manipulation of the environment, the lighting, the labels, the placement of other works of art."<sup>258</sup> In 1998 Mary Anne Staniszewski argued that visual effect, display and narrative were central to any exhibition and discussed the important functions of "curating, exhibition design and spatially arranged exhibition forms."<sup>259</sup>

A substantial proportion of museum visitor research in recent years has been directed towards the area of exhibition design. Studies of how visitors interact with exhibitions have shown that the designed spaces of exhibition galleries have the greatest influence on the visitor experience. Falk and Dierking, in their research on the nature, quality and impact of museum experiences and discussed earlier in this chapter, have drawn

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<sup>257</sup> Philip Johnson cited in Zoë Ryan (ed.), *As Seen: Exhibitions that made Architecture and Design History*, The Art Institute of Chicago, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017: 18.

<sup>258</sup> Jonathan Watkins cited by Paul O'Neill in 'The Co-Dependent Curator', *Art Monthly* 291, November 2005. Available at: <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/the-co-dependent-curator-by-paul-oneill-november-2005> (Accessed 12.07.17).

<sup>259</sup> Mary-Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A history of exhibition installation at the Museum of Modern*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998: xxi.

attention to the fact that too many exhibitions are designed with the assumption that the museum, rather than the visitor, controls the experience.<sup>260</sup> They argue that exhibitions are, and should be, designed to engage the visitor in a learning experience that involves them stopping, looking and making sense of the information presented. The research has led to a shift towards exhibition design as now explicitly audience-focused with the aim of creating a relationship between the visitor, the space and the object. Exhibition design operates as an interpretation tool for ordering the work and helps to provide a frame that brings the concept and content of an exhibition alive.

This shift has also brought about a review of the role of exhibition graphics as an interpretive device in the exhibition. In the early years of the museum, exhibitions presented collections for public view and communicated the voice of the specialist curator. Labels and other interpretive materials were often verbose and highly technical. New interpretation methods introduced in the 1990s attempted to bring the world of the expert and the world of the visitor closer together. New guidelines for labelling were introduced that aimed to achieve a balance between accuracy and intelligibility. In 1999 the Campaign for Museums, supported by the Museums Association and the Department for Education and Employment, launched a new initiative. 'Design a Label' aimed to generate a debate about labelling and interpretation while at the same time offering practical information for museums and galleries to make labels easier to read and understand by visitors.<sup>261</sup> Such initiatives resulted in the development of new writing styles, with labels written in a language that was short, simple and direct. Many museums introduced a hierarchy of information that distinguished between general and specialist information. Standards were established regarding type size and layout, placement, background contrast and other design issues all to improve

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<sup>260</sup> John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (eds.), *The Museum Experience Revisited*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013: 105.

<sup>261</sup> *Design a Label: Guidelines on Labelling for Museums*, Museums Association and The campaign for Museums, May 1999: 1-8.



legibility. The guidelines extended beyond the text on walls to more visual presentations such as signage and interpretive graphics.

The inherently spatial character of narrative and storytelling has influenced curatorial approaches in museums but also at many other different types of cultural venues such as visitor centres, historic sites, entertainment venues, educational environments, sports events, retail destinations, branded environments, corporate events, product launches, urban and community environments. The narrative approach also engenders a highly collaborative approach with distinct disciplines contributing to the narrative process including architects, curators, destination consultants, 3D designers, communication designers, interaction designers, time-based media designers, scenographers, writers, retailers and project managers.<sup>262</sup>

## **2.7 Curating Narrative and Experiential Environments**

Over the last two decades, the narrative and experiential approach to curating exhibitions has influenced curating practice at a range of institutions. Educational theorists such as Falk and Dierking have commented on the fact that most visitors are drawn to exhibitions that are both visually compelling and intrinsically interesting to them on a personal level. Falk and Dierking's research in particular, discussed in section 2.2, suggests a sophisticated understanding of the need for both education and entertainment to be intrinsic ingredients of the museum experience.

The education versus entertainment debate has been a long-running debate in the museum sector. For curators they are two ideologically laden terms, as Falk and Dierking have noted; "to the academic, education connotes importance and quality, while entertainment suggests vacuousness and frivolity." They argue that the area has been something of an epistemological blind spot for some curators who continue to treat the two variables as if they were mutually exclusive instead of

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<sup>262</sup> MA Narrative Environments Degree Show Catalogue, Central Saint Martins, London, 2015 - 2017: 4-5.

complementary aspects of a complex leisure experience.<sup>263</sup>

Supporting this argument has been research undertaken into alternative modes of spectatorship, in particular immersive and interactive ways of experiencing visual spectacle and not usually considered part of the canon of design exhibitions.<sup>264</sup> The research has assisted in fostering an understanding of the nature of immersive spectacle and the role of theatricality, performance and illusion in shaping the visitor experience. As more exhibitions are studied intensively, many of the traditional perceptions of how visitors use museums are coming into question, such as not engaging with interactive exhibits or reading text and graphic panels. As Alison Griffiths has noted, “the search for innovative methods of immersing spectators in exhibit spaces has been something of a holy grail for museum curators.”<sup>265</sup>

In *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums & the Immersive View*, Alison Griffiths examines less obvious exhibition sites such as the medieval cathedral, the panorama, the planetarium, the IMAX theatre and the science museum as exemplary spaces of immersion and interactivity. Writing within the context of film spectatorship, she argues that spectators first encountered immersive ways of experiencing the world within these environments and by so doing, reveals the antecedents of modern media forms that suggest a deep-seated desire in the spectator to be come immersed in a virtual world. Griffiths’ research marks out the museum as the perfect institutional venue for drawing these ideas into sharp relief. She demonstrates how immersive and interactive display techniques, reconstructed environments and touch-screen computer technology have redefined the museum space. Griffiths clarifies her use of the term *immersion*:-

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<sup>263</sup> John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (eds.), *The Museum Experience Revisited*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013: 114.

<sup>264</sup> Important research has been undertaken by Alison Griffiths published as *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums & the Immersive View*, Columbia University Press, 2013.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*: 250.

“I use the term *immersion* in this book to explain the sense of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the world and that eschews conventional modes of spectatorship in favour of a more bodily participation in the experience, including allowing the spectator to move freely around the viewing space.”<sup>266</sup>

She argues that spectators feel enveloped in immersive spaces and strangely affected by a strong sense of the otherness of the virtual world entered, “neither fully lost in the experience nor completely in the here and now.”<sup>267</sup>

Oliver Grau provides a useful definition for immersion in his book *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, that links back to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘flow’ discussed in section 2.2. Grau argues that:-

“In most cases immersion is mentally absorbing and a process, a change, a passage from one mental state to another... characterised by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing mental involvement.”<sup>268</sup>

In an interview following the publication of her book, Griffiths was asked to define what she meant by “the immersive view” and why the term was generating so much debate in contemporary culture. She explains that an immersive view is provided by an image or space such as a painting, photograph, film, or museum exhibit that gives the spectator a heightened sense of being transported to another time or place.<sup>269</sup> She argues that it is not possible to talk about the immersive view without talking about museums. A great many of the themes uniting immersive spaces are all mobilised in the museum. For Griffiths, museums of natural history deliver immersion on two fronts as they often feature exhibits that re-create natural environments such as the rainforest and also frequently feature

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<sup>266</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums & the Immersive View*, Columbia University Press, 2013: 2.

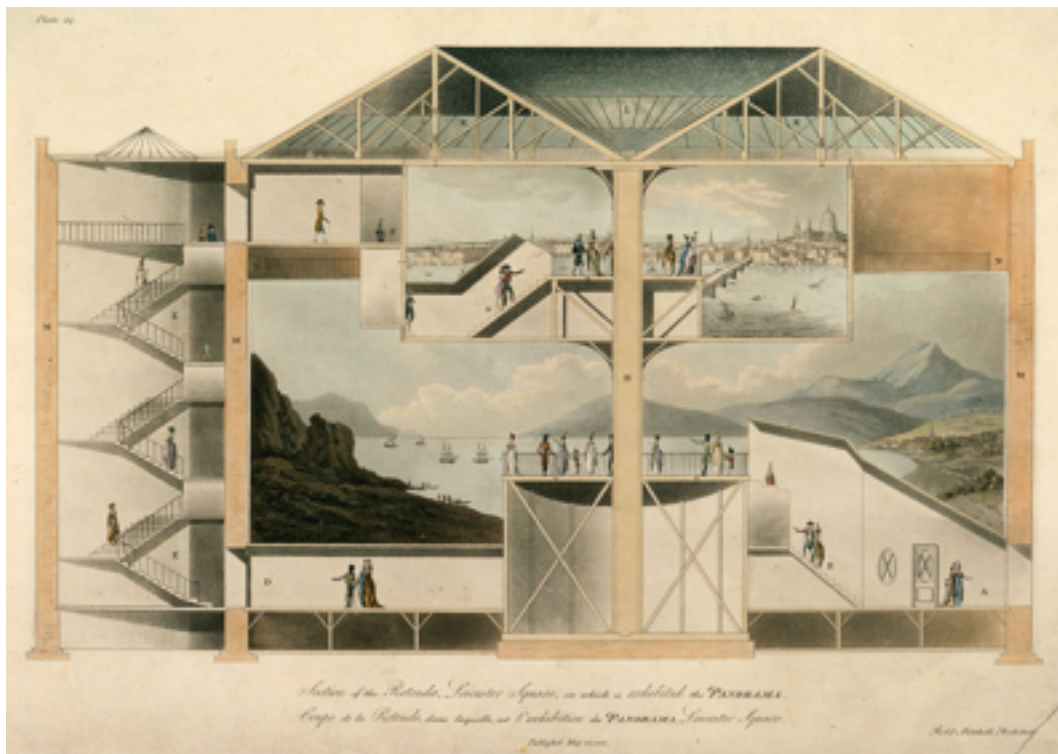
<sup>267</sup> Ibid.: 3.

<sup>268</sup> Oliver Grau, *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*, Boston: MIT Press, 2003: 13.

<sup>269</sup> ‘An interview with Alison Griffiths’, *Columbia University Press*, 2013. Available at: <https://cup.columbia.edu/author-interviews/griffiths-shivers-down-your-spine> (Accessed 12.07.17).

IMAX screens which are exemplary at delivering immersion. Museums have always relied upon technologies of vision and sound, such as photography, recorded sound, cinema, and electronic images to heighten the gallery experience and to enhance learning and understanding through sensory and emotional appeal.

As Griffiths' research demonstrates, maintaining the right balance between science and spectacle has been a perennial challenge for the modern museum. There is a strong historical precedent for immersing spectators in the represented space and taking them beyond the 'here and now' of the exhibit. Ideas of spectacle and immersion were defining features of contemporary amusements such as panoramas, vast circular paintings popular during the nineteenth century, planetariums and museums of science and natural history that have long exploited the phenomenon. Panoramas, sometimes called cycloramas, were among the earliest and most commercially successful forms of mass visual entertainment. A panorama was a huge 360-degree painting hung along the circumference of an interior wall of a specially designed circular building. At the centre was a viewing platform reached by a flight of stairs allowing the spectator to view the huge canvases that surrounded them. The panorama privileged an immersive mode of spectatorship communicating to audiences that what they were experiencing was unique, memorable and uncanny.



**Fig. 23:** Cross-section of Robert Barker's panorama rotunda in London's Leicester Square, 1793.

Like the panorama, the planetarium experience, which developed during the 1950s and 1960s, takes place inside a dome where a virtual reality is illusionistically constructed. A planetarium show is a combination of the art of the theatre and the science of astronomy. Spectators take their seat in a darkened auditorium and are transported to outer space to see star constellations, galaxies and phenomena such as asteroids and black holes projected onto the dome described by Griffiths as “the upward revered gaze”<sup>270</sup> The planetarium as an example of immersive technology combined spectacle, science and popular amusement and offered to the viewer the possibility of escaping out of the present and into another time and space. For Griffiths, there is, therefore, a strong sense of déjà vu in contemporary debates about new media in the museum and the role of immersive and interactive environments.

Over the last two decades in an increasingly digital and interactive age, museums have explored a wide variety of methods and subject matter to

<sup>270</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums & the Immersive View*, Columbia University Press: 143.

engage with their audiences. Visitors are no longer considered to be passive readers of an exhibition but an active voyager in the exhibition journey. In order to enhance visitor experiences, curators now embrace more spatial interventions such as interior architecture and theatrical installations to transform the museum space into immersive environments. Designed exhibition spaces become a stage for dramas and theatrical effects. As Judith Barry has noted:-

“Increasingly, [there is a] sway of another kind of exhibition design, one designed not simply for display, but specifically for consumption, to cause an active response in the consumer, to create an exchange.”<sup>271</sup>

This approach has influenced curators working outside the context of the museum. In 2008 interior stylist and designer Faye Toogood founded Studio Toogood to “create environments and experiences that immerse the viewer and communicate concepts through commanding all of the senses.” The studio’s commercial projects include interior retail environments such as the re-design of Dover Street Market, Liberty’s window displays and Tom Dixon’s London showroom. As well as commercial projects, the studio has an international presence at design fairs such as the Salone del Mobile and London Design Festival. In 2009 Toogood created a series of installations of varying scales at London Design Festival. In an interview, she commented:-

“I think there is obviously a time and a place for the “white cube” approach, but I feel that it’s often an overused method, adopted by many, in the hope it will elevate a product and its design credentials beyond its worth. It’s very easy to stick something on a white plinth in a gallery-like environment and hope for the best. Each project that we work on is entirely different and we try to find ways of communicating the value of what is being presented by creating an experience around it - without overpowering it. This approach isn’t about competing with the products but more about inspiring people to poke them, pick them up, sit on them, wear them, walk off with them or simply stare at them.”<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Judith Barry, ‘Dissenting Spaces’ in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairn (eds), *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996: 311.

<sup>272</sup> ‘2 or 3 questions for Studio Toogood’, *Moco Loco* webarchive, 2012. Available at: <https://mocoloco.com/2-or-3-questions-for-studio-toogood/> (Accessed 8.10.17).

In 2012 Studio Toogood designed an installation as a visual antidote to the chaos of the Salone del Mobile. *La Cura* was conceived as a hospital for the senses in which visitors were invited to rebalance through a series of intimate performances. Participants were seated on a circle of bandaged chairs around a central pavilion where figures in white tended a garden of clay sculptures. They were offered an elixir created by food designers, Arrabeschi di Latte, before being presented with an enamel dish and ball of clay to mould. The 'caretakers' collected each clay sculpture in turn and committed them to the central pavilion where they become part of a collaborative sculpture that grew as the week progressed.



**Fig. 24:** *La Cura*: Installation curated by Studio Toogood, Salone del Mobile, Milan, 2012.

Projects like *La Cura* represent a new form of exhibition practice which uses a site specific installation to promote a deeper engagement with the visitor and enhances understanding of the ideas presented. They can also act as sites for experimentation where a new understanding can be created through the interaction of the visitor which, in turn, feeds back into the practice of the designers.

This new approach to the visitor experience determines a radically different curatorial process to the conventional 'historical' or object driven modes of display where significant objects are presented as "design pieces" without any context or story. It looks to the creation of different visitor experiences where the visitor determines relationships between exhibits and make sense of what is on display. The curator offers multiple modes of engagement to inspire an understanding of design concepts and practices, as Paula Marincola has commented:-

“A well-curated show, in fact, is that it seemingly elevates and enriches our experience of all the art that it presents. It provides lesser works with a setting in which they shine, and in which they're most interesting.”<sup>273</sup>

Since the late 1990s, exhibitions that exemplified this new approach were often described as 'blockbusters', a term more commonly applied to films and not usually associated with art exhibitions. Blockbuster exhibitions were large-scale, popular, moneymaking showcases that delivered a powerful impact. They became important sources of revenue for museums and created visibility and prestige for museums both nationally and internationally. In the early 2000s, the rise of the so-called 'blockbuster' exhibition was characterised at the V&A by a series of large-scale international exhibitions that demonstrated this new approach. The exhibition, *Art Nouveau 1890 - 1914* (6 April - 30 July 2000) began a series of style exhibitions that included *Art Deco 1910-1939* (27 March - 20 July 2003); *Modernism 1914 - 39: Designing a New World* (2006); *Cold War Modern: Design 1945 - 70* (25 September 2008 - 11 January 2009) and *Post Modernism: Style and Subversion 1970 - 1990* (24 September 2011 - 8 January 2012). Brian Ferrisa, Director and Chief Curator of the Portland Art Museum, Oregon has suggested that the power of these exhibitions lie in their ability to tell stories by “connecting strong

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<sup>273</sup> Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Press, 2006: 44.



ideas to fabulous objects and putting the person in the place and in the space”.<sup>274</sup>

In 2013 the V&A staged a retrospective exhibition of the musician David Bowie, *David Bowie is ...* (23 March - 11 August 2013). The museum had previously curated exhibitions of living musicians but the Bowie exhibition was singled out by reviewers for its innovative interpretive approach. In media interviews, the curators Victoria Broackes and Geoffrey Marsh, explained that, rather than presenting a traditional chronological exhibition, they had wanted to examine Bowie’s creative process through lateral associations and position Bowie as a figure who was hugely influential in art, design, music, pop culture and society.<sup>275</sup> The curators had direct access to Bowie’s personal archive and the exhibition featured a broad range of material that included stage costumes, original hand-written lyrics, album covers and film. They deployed different creative techniques in the exhibition to achieve an immersive effect. Headphones were issued to every visitor so that they were able to listen to Bowie soundtracks which changed as they walked through the installation. Huge inverted set designs and high impact video projections integrated objects and themes into a theatrical environment that was intended to capture the excitement of a live performance.<sup>276</sup>

The success of the curatorial interpretation was confirmed by reviewers of the exhibition:-

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<sup>274</sup> V&A Touring Exhibitions promotional trailer. Available at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/exhibitions-for-hire> (Accessed 8.10.17).

<sup>275</sup> ‘David Bowie Is - an interview with V&A curator Geoffrey Marsh’, *Phaidon* webarchive, 18 March 2013. Available at <http://uk.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/march/18/david-bowie-is-an-interview-with-the-vanda-curator/> (Accessed 8.10.17)

<sup>276</sup> Lauren Field, ‘A Portrait in Flesh: An interview with the assistant curator of David Bowie Is’, *Un-making Things*, 2013. Available at: <http://unmakingthings.rca.ac.uk/2013/david-bowie-is-an-interview-with-the-assistant-curator/> (Accessed 8.10.17).

“Then, in the final room, you encounter the apotheosis of Bowie, the musician. On huge screens, five times life sized, film of legendary performances plays, with the costumes glittering through the gauze. The sheer grandeur brought tears to my eyes...I can’t believe you will walk away from this stunning exhibition without understanding a little of why he inspired those of us who love him.<sup>277</sup>



**Fig. 25:** *David Bowie Is...* at the V&A London, 23 March - 11 August 2013. Curated by Victoria Broackes and Geoffrey Marsh.

Helen Charman, formerly Director of Learning and Research at the Design Museum, London and now Director of Learning at the V&A, observed a similar strategy at the Design Museum with fashion exhibitions that include *Hussein Chalayan: From fashion and back* (2009), *Christian Louboutin* (2012) and *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* (2013).<sup>278</sup> In her view, each of these exhibitions created an immersive environment, differentiating and distinguishing design curating from Brian O’Doherty’s description of the “white cube” gallery environment, in which “everything but the work itself is expunged in order to provide an unadulterated pure

<sup>277</sup> Sarah Crompton, ‘David Bowie: the show goes on at the V&A’, *The Telegraph*, 18 March 2013. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopmusic/9937804/David-Bowie-the-show-goes-on-at-the-VandA.html> (Accessed 8.10.17).

<sup>278</sup> Helen Charman, ‘x’, in Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (eds.), *Design Objects and the Museum*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012: 144.

visual engagement with art.”<sup>279</sup> These exhibitions will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3 when I explicitly discuss the development of the Design Museum as a context for my own curatorial practice.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has identified, the last two decades have witnessed significant changes to the operating landscape for museums in the UK resulting in a rapidly shifting landscape for curatorial practice. The chapter has marked out the emergence of new discourses surrounding the design exhibition. Fluctuating budgets, advances in digital technologies and evolving audience expectations have presented new challenges, but also opportunities for contemporary curators. In the present moment, the field is being influenced by a multitude of cross-cultural and global conversations which are opening up new definitions, processes and ways of working.

One of the most significant discussions in the field of contemporary design curating practice, as well as in cultural institutions more broadly, is how institutions can more successfully interact and engage with their audiences. This research has suggested that contemporary curatorial approaches are informed by a sophisticated understanding of the motivations for visiting an exhibition and the devices available to foster direct engagement with its content. The shift towards highly designed environments, adopting approaches common to the leisure and retail industries, has extended into the design exhibition.

Since the late 1990s a number of educational theorists have promoted the idea that education and entertainment are related and complementary aspects of the museum experience.<sup>280</sup> Educational and

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<sup>279</sup> Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, University of California Press, 1976.

<sup>280</sup> Educational theories include; Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *The Educational Role of the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1999; John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (eds.) *The Museum Experience Revisited*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

entertainment-related needs are provided by exhibitions but also by learning programmes and public programmes. Whilst museums and galleries are fundamentally educational in character, entertainment in museums has the potential to offer something new, exciting and potentially valuable as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill identified in 1994:-

“Entertainment in museums, however it might be presented, is used as a method of education, in the full knowledge that learning is best achieved in circumstances of enjoyment.”<sup>281</sup>

In 2016 Deyan Sudjic, Director of the Design Museum, London was interviewed shortly after the museum’s move to a new location in Kensington, west London. As more museums compete with spectacular attractions, entertainment and the internet, he was asked how the Design Museum had reacted. Sudjic responded by saying that Terence Conran, the founder of the museum, had tried to introduce the same elements of change. The first time a car was displayed at the V&A in 1981, as part of the Boilerhouse Project, it provoked a strong public response. The subjects of the Boilerhouse exhibitions included Coca-Cola, Sony Design and Issey Miyake, all of which were seen as transgressive at the time. Even the techniques of display, to put film inside a display was seen as “somehow not done, somehow too flashy, too showy”. Sudjic went on to say:-

“Museums in those days were dominated by the keepers whose primary objective was to amass great objects and look after them, and a wider audience was distracting, or might damage things. Nowadays, museums have shifted to a more narrative, curatorially-led approach. It’s more like journalism. Using things to say something is important.”<sup>282</sup>

The following chapter turns its attention to the Design Museum, London as the institutional context for my professional practice and practice-informed

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<sup>281</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994: 140.

<sup>282</sup> Herbert Wright, ‘Understanding the World through Design’, *CoBo Social* webarchive, 23 November 2016. Available at <https://www.cobosocial.com/dossiers/deyan-sudjic-interview/> (Accessed 10.02.18).

research. The chapter will examine how the key shifts and approaches identified and discussed in Chapter 2 influenced policies and programming at the museum, and translated to the way in which design exhibitions and events were conceived and presented.

## CHAPTER 3:

### The Development of the Design Museum, London, 1980 - 2018

**“The creation of any museum is unusual; the creation of a Design Museum even more so. Since they betray contemporary preoccupations, a history of the national temperament could be written in terms of the museum. You have classical archaeology in the age of the ‘grand tour’, ethnography as explorers pushed into darker continents, science in the century of mechanised war and now, approaching a millennium...design.”**

Stephen Bayley (1989)<sup>283</sup>

#### 3.1 The Origins of the Design Museum: Terence Conran and the Boilerhouse Project

Stephen Bayley, writing a few months before the official opening of the Design Museum in London, positioned the new museum within a broader context of the development of museums. He identified the museum as a unique platform for reflecting and communicating contemporary concerns. When it opened in 1989, the Design Museum was the first museum of contemporary design in the UK. It derived from an earlier enterprise known as the Boilerhouse Project. Initiated in the early 1980's, it was the first venture of The Conran Foundation, an educational charity established by Terence Conran, then Chairman of the retail outlets *Habitat* and *Mothercare*. The origins of the Design Museum, London are rooted in the Boilerhouse Project but its story begins some years earlier in the 1970s when a new type of specialist museum emerged on the global stage focused on the collection, study and exhibition of modern and contemporary design.

As Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis have explored, since their formation in the nineteenth century, museums have changed in response to broader political, economic, social and technological changes and the Design Museum is no exception. The development of the Design Museum can be

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<sup>283</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Commerce and Culture: From Pre-Industrial Art to Post-Industrial Value*, London: Design Museum, 1989: 5.

interpreted as a response to these wider shifts.

This chapter explores the development of the Design Museum, London. It begins by examining the museum's origins as the Boilerhouse Project in the basement of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) (1982-1986), its subsequent move from South Kensington to a purpose-built museum at Shad Thames in south-east London (1989 - 2015) and ends with its most recent incarnation at the former Commonwealth Institute, Kensington, west London (2016 - present). The chapter examines the museum's development through its changing mission statements which are used as a lens through which to reflect changing approaches to the interpretation of contemporary design in the museum and the evolving practice of curating design. The Design Museum also provides the context for the development of my own practice as a curator and educator and serves to locate the reflection on my practice in Chapter 4.

The Design Museum was founded by designer, retailer and business entrepreneur, Terence Conran in the belief that design has a vital part to play in shaping and understanding the world. In his autobiography published in 2016, Conran reflects on how he had been involved in selling design to the public and to industry since the 1950s, when as a designer he had abandoned his studies in textiles at the Central School of Art and Design to work on the Festival of Britain in 1951.<sup>284</sup> The following year he established Conran & Company making furniture in a modern style. Inspired by a trip to France, Conran opened his first restaurant, *The Soup Kitchen* in Chandos Place, central London and a chain of restaurants followed. His first shop, *Habitat*, opened on London's Fulham Road in 1964. For a generation growing up in the austerity of post-war Britain and who did not necessarily share their parent's tastes, Habitat offered a different kind of home store. The store combined European and American modernism juxtaposing leather lounge chairs and tubular steel furniture alongside Japanese paper lanterns, French earthenware, German

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<sup>284</sup> Terence Conran, *My Life in Design*, London: Conran Octopus, 2016: 14-15.

consumer electronics by Braun and new continental imports like the duvet which became a bestseller. Customers identified with a life style which Habitat promoted through thoughtfully designed store displays and catalogues of seductively photographed interiors. In its first catalogue Habitat offered “instant good taste...for well-switched-on people.”<sup>285</sup> Stephen Bayley later reflected that Conran’s great achievement was in elevating design to a commodity:-

“A scrubbed wooden table from a French monastery, a coarse glass jug holding a single daffodil stem, a Bauhaus chair, a French white porcelain *batterie de cuisine* and modern jazz from a Dieter Rams SK4 record player...It was about fine things enjoyed by civilised folk. He has always been reluctant to acknowledge the role of taste in his own judgments.”<sup>286</sup>



**Fig. 26:** Terence Conran photographed inside a Habitat store, c.1964.

Habitat grew into an international chain and was regularly featured in the Sunday colour supplements during the 1970s and 80s. In 1977 Habitat catalogues began to be sold on UK news stands and in branches of the

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<sup>285</sup> Tom Wilson, *The Story of the Design Museum*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016: 17.

<sup>286</sup> Stephen Bayley, ‘How the Design Museum lost its way’, *The Spectator*, 13 August 2016. Available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/08/how-the-design-museum-lost-its-way-by-co-founder-stephen-bayley/> (Accessed 12.06.17).



high street newsagent, WH Smith, highlighting the far-reaching popularity of the concept. For Conran, coming out of the dreary and austere post-war years, there was the opportunity to reshape the world in a new, more enjoyable image and add a little colour to life, “We had looked at the Bauhaus in Germany and what they had achieved and hoped that we could extend those ideals to Britain.”<sup>287</sup>

Habitat and *Nova* magazine both launched in 1964 and were key opinion formers during the 1960s. In May 1967 *Nova* published an article called ‘Where are all the three-piece suites?’ Alongside illustrations of drinks cans, plastic bottles, paper dresses and cardboard furniture, the article described how people had been conditioned to believe that they needed to buy furniture that would last a lifetime. Now attitudes had changed and expendability was the norm, as Lesley Jackson writing for *The Observer* in 1999 reflected:-

“Cheap materials and mass-produced methods are providing the consumer market with a whole range of goods which are efficient - and so cheap that you can discard them when you like without feeling guilty.”<sup>288</sup>

Habitat’s founding principles reflect this new attitude. Writing in 2011, Ben Highmore, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sussex, suggests that Habitat’s success owed much to the fact that it offered a new type of shopping experience, which was the antithesis of the department store, “A world of glass cabinets, with a mausoleum-hush, gives way to a world of informality, where the haughty advice of shop assistants (assistants who might be more snobbish than their clientele) is replaced by the authority of knowledge gained from touching and feeling.”<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Terence Conran, *My Life in Design*, London: Conran Octopus, 2016: 16.

<sup>288</sup> Lesley Jackson, ‘The Birth of the Designer’ in ‘Best of British: 1960-1999 Four Decades of Design’, *The Observer* in association with D&AD, 1999: 7.

<sup>289</sup> Ben Highmore, ‘Feeling it: Habitat, taste and the new middle class in 1970s Britain’, *New Formations*, 88 (Spring), 2016: 105-122.

In Highmore's view, Habitat represented a new genre that was constitutive of "a taste formation." It didn't just offer chairs and cutlery, cushions and butcher's blocks, but smells, sounds, cooking, living, parenting, socialising, inhabiting, and so on. Habitat promoted a new way of life and supplied the material support for it in the form of interior decoration and furnishings. Some of this was achieved through the pedagogic strategies of the shop and the catalogues. As Highmore points out, the selecting and connecting of items was the point of Habitat. As the store's first press release quoted:-

"We hope we have taken the foot slogging out of shopping by assembling a wise selection of unusual and top-quality goods under one roof. It has taken us a year to complete this pre-digested shopping programme."<sup>290</sup>

This process of selecting and displaying goods sourced from around the world can be connected to an earlier role for museums as connoisseurs and subject specialists, discussed in Chapter 1. It also connects to the future development of the design museum. Habitat was bringing modern design within everyone's reach, and in so doing, invoking Conran as a designer, retailer, tastemaker and as a prototype curator.

In the late 1970s, and after Habitat became a public company, Conran began discussions with Paul Reilly, formerly Director of the Design Council, to realise an ambition to create a museum of industrial design in Britain featuring products from across the world.<sup>291</sup> Reilly introduced Conran to Stephen Bayley, a lecturer in art history at the University of Kent, who had produced research on the design sector for the Design Council. Conran and his team embarked on the search for a location to create a purpose-built structure which would combine the functions of exhibition space, permanent collection, archive, library, study and design facilities. It would stage temporary exhibitions about design as well as

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<sup>290</sup> Habitat Press release, 11 May 1964 cited in Ben Highmore, 'Feeling it: Habitat, taste and the new middle class in 1970s Britain', *New Formations*, 88 (Spring), 2016: 105-122.

<sup>291</sup> Tom Wilson provides a summary of the search for a suitable site for a new museum of design and the development of the Boilerhouse Project in *The Story of the Design Museum, London*: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016: 21 - 29.

advertise plans to build a future design museum. In 1978 Conran asked Bayley to undertake a feasibility report into the creation of a new museum of industrial design and funded a research trip around Europe and the United States. Bayley discovered that while New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Pompidou Centre in Paris had collections of industrial design, these tended to be subsumed within wider art collections. The outcome of his research confirmed that there was no major institution internationally focused on industrial design.

The final substantial report, completed in May 1979, proved key to Bayley's future role.<sup>292</sup> The document laid out the team's aim of opening a "Museum of Industrial Design in Britain", in Milton Keynes, with the help of Fred Roche, who had been part of the planning team for the new town, and was partner to Conran in the architectural and planning consultancy, Conran Roche. This document represents one of the first steps in the process of creating the Design Museum, positioning the museum within a developing discourse of design, and flags-up the importance of a name, in this case, the "Museum of Industrial Design".<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> The Conran Foundation, Feasibility Report, undated, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>293</sup> Paul Reilly files, Boilerhouse Papers, V&A Archives, London.



**Fig. 27:** Terence Conran and Stephen Bayley at the Design Museum, 1989.

After discussions to open a museum in Milton Keynes fell through, Sir Roy Strong, director of the V&A, offered Conran a temporary exhibition space at the museum. Two sites were identified, one called Clinch's Hole in the middle of the Museum, the other the old Boilerhouse yard on the Museum's western boundary, opposite the entrance to the Science Museum. The Boilerhouse location was chosen and in 1982, following an ambitious refurbishment of the Boilerhouse yard, it was ready for use.

The exhibition space was essentially a concealed white cube, its walls and floor were covered with bright, white tiles and lit by Erco spotlights. It corresponded to the ideological construction of the white cube, a foundational concept of modern western art museums since the early twentieth century. It also specifically referenced the display strategies of

modern art and which links back to the exhibition, *Machine Art* at MoMA in 1934 and discussed in Chapter 1 (1.3). The white cube's unique features were later described by Brian O' Doherty:-

“The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light...The art is free...to take on its own life.”<sup>294</sup>

The space was often described as clinical by contemporary commentators. The art critic Brian Sewell described the space as “a subterranean installation so aesthetically hygienic that it seemed to have been sanitised for our protection”,<sup>295</sup> while cultural commentator Peter York referred to it as “Emergency Ward 10.”<sup>296</sup>

Conran's vision for the Boilerhouse Project had a strong educational purpose and was born of a fierce conviction:-

“It was the feeling that we could use intelligent design to change and improve Britain, so acting as a catalyst for social and economic change...I kept coming back to the realisation that design education was not being well understood by the government and that it could be vitally important to the future of our country.”<sup>297</sup>

As a model, Conran had looked to the Triennale exhibitions in Milan, discussed in Chapter 1 (1.3), where he had seen at first hand the best of contemporary Italian and international design at a time when Italian designers were dominant. Conran's intention was to establish a permanent collection of mass-produced consumer products, for consumers but also to provide strong exemplars for business and industry. The stated purpose for the Boilerhouse was:-

“to stage an exemplary and challenging series of exhibitions about the history, theory, process and practice of design that explored the

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<sup>294</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, University of California Press, 1976: 15.

<sup>295</sup> Brian Sewell cited in Peter York, 'Chic Graphique' in *Modern Times*: 26.

<sup>296</sup> Peter York, 'Chic Graphique' in *Modern Times*: 26.

<sup>297</sup> Sir Terence Conran, Foreword in Tom Wilson, *The Story of the Design Museum*, London: Phaidon, 2016: 7.

relationships between design, industry and commerce.”<sup>298</sup>

Bayley wanted the Boilerhouse to be a vital and living institution and concentrate on a contemporary exhibitions programme that freed it from the burdens of archiving, conservation and cataloguing, and which allowed it to be light on its feet and quick to react to developing events. The higher ambition was to contribute toward reversing the prejudice against mass production, as opposed to limited edition art or craft pieces, and to foster an appreciation of the process and practice of design. In the five years it was open the Boilerhouse Project held many lively, original and acclaimed exhibitions, including shows on the Italian avant-garde group Memphis, Issey Miyake, Dieter Rams and a case study of the development of the Ford Sierra.

An early promotional brochure for the Boilerhouse quotes the American designer and writer, George Nelson. In comparing modern living with life in the Middle Ages, Nelson claimed that as far as artists and designers are concerned, “you’ve either got the Church or you’ve got IBM”, in other words, a belief in either religion or technology.<sup>299</sup> The brochure carried images of contemporary mass produced design of the twentieth century; a drawing by the Porsche design office for a Volkswagen prototype (early 1930s), an Olivetti poster designed by Xanti Schawinsky (1935), a circuit board (1982) and a fan blade from a Rolls Royce turbine engine (1987). As Bayley later reflected:-

“No one had put a car on display in the V&A before because with the Victorian taxonomy no one could decide if a car came under ‘metalwork’ or ‘sculpture’. We did. It was a Saab.”<sup>300</sup>

Bailey’s explicit reference to a car as an example of twentieth century industrial design, was in direct opposition to the way in which

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<sup>298</sup> The Conran Foundation, Promotional brochure for a new Design Museum, 1988, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>299</sup> Promotional brochure for The Boilerhouse, undated, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>300</sup> Stephen Bayley, ‘Behind the Scenes at the Museum’, *The Independent*, 17 September 2006. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/behind-the-scenes-at-the-museum-415998.html> (Accessed 9.04.17).

contemporary design was viewed by museums of decorative arts where commerce and culture have often sat uncomfortably together. As Joanna Weddell's research has shown, Sir John Pope-Hennessy, director of the V&A in the 1970s, had been dismissive about the museum's relationship between culture and commerce.<sup>301</sup> As an Italian Renaissance scholar he had little interest in the products of twentieth century industrial design. Such things were only allowed into the V&A under the guise of the increasingly marginalised 'circulating collections'. Set up in 1948, the Circulation Department, known as 'Circ', sent small and large scale touring exhibitions to museums and art schools around the UK. Circ was specifically engaged with the contemporary, and was the only V&A department to seriously pursue the acquisition and display of new design objects during the period. From her analysis of the published writings of Peter Floud, Circ's Keeper during the 1950s, and 60s, Weddell notes tensions and oppositions between art and industry, with "industrial design" a particularly contested item. Contemporary design took second place to what were regarded as the more elevated study of artefacts untainted by the concerns of modern consumerism such as classical sculpture or ceramics.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Joanna Weddell, 'The Ethos of the Victoria and Albert Museum Circulation Department 1947-1960', in Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (eds.), *Design Objects and the Museum*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012: 15.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*: 15.



**Fig. 28:** The Sculpture Court at the V&A, London, 1980s.

However, this marginalisation was not necessarily a problem. Maurice Davies, Director of the Museums Association, has suggested that the tentative place of the Boilerhouse “squatting at the V&A, perhaps both symbiotic and parasitic”, gave it the confidence to be not just highly creative but also rather mischievous:-

“My favourite show there was about national characteristics in design. It managed to be simultaneously insightful and hilarious in identifying national stereotypes. I still miss the Boilerhouse’s brave combination of intelligence and parody.”<sup>303</sup>

The first year of the Boilerhouse Project saw five exhibitions, the first, *Art and Industry: A Century of Design in the Products we use* opened on 14 January 1982. The exhibition was the first of a series of exhibitions about the history, theory and practice of design. It celebrated the work of influential designers and their relationship with manufacturers through a series of case studies. Objects were placed on white display stands and they included Raymond Loewy’s duplicator for Gestetner, Ettore Sottsass’s typewriter for Olivetti, Walter Dorwin Teague’s work for Boeing and a petrol

<sup>303</sup> Maurice Davies, Blog post, 23 November 2016. Available at: <https://charlessaumarezsmith.com/2016/11/22/boilerhouse-project/> (Accessed 28.11.16).



pump designed by Eliot Noyes for Mobil, which remains a part of the Design Museum's permanent collection.

The second exhibition presented a calculated contrast, a history of *Sony*, the Japanese manufacturer of consumer electronics, with a detailed survey of production. The product packaging was the display structure in the exhibition with products displayed on piles of empty boxes.



**Fig. 29:** *The Past, Present and Future of Sony* at the Boilerhouse, 1982

This exhibition was followed by a monographic exhibition on the German designer *Dieter Rams* and an exhibition titled *52 Months to Job One: How they designed the Ford Sierra*. The year ended with an exhibition, *Memphis Milano in London*, a presentation of furniture, glass, ceramics and fabrics produced by the Italian avant-garde design group. Later exhibitions included subjects as diverse as design from Denmark, advertising and art direction, a history of taste, robotics and the ergonomics of hand tools. The Boilerhouse exhibitions also introduced a number of innovative display approaches that moved away from the conventional method of objects housed in glass cases. For the exhibition on Japanese fashion designer Issey Miyake, the immaculate, white tiled gallery was pumped full of black foam rubber from which bald, glossy black mannequins protruded and floated above the foam. In 1984 Bayley

employed John Pawson's extreme minimalistic design for the *Hand Tools* exhibition which used long, low black wedges to display the objects forcing the visitor to bend down to view the exhibits.

When interviewed in 1989, Bayley reflected on his achievements at the Boilerhouse and his approach to exhibition-making which he considered to be more akin to theatre:-

"I'm convinced that to make exhibitions effective, you have to regard them as a form of theatre, which is why I like to use as many sophisticated devices as possible. I want to educate and interest people, and so I'll consider anything. Part of my job is to create debate, if people get angry, at least they start thinking and talking."<sup>304</sup>

In order to create a sense of theatricality, Bayley used attention-grabbing exhibition design techniques. In 1993 Bailey chose a dustbin as display device in an exhibition on the subject of taste. *Taste: An exhibition about Values in Design* presented objects displayed on upturned galvanised steel dustbins or on white plinths, according to Bayley's judgement of their taste value. Like Habitat before it, the Boilerhouse Project was very much about the formation of taste and elevating the status of mass produced objects.



<sup>304</sup> Stephen Bayley Press Cuttings files, the Design Museum Archives, London.

**Fig. 30:** Introduction to *Taste: An exhibition about values in design* at the Boilerhouse, 1983.

The Boilerhouse Project positioned itself firmly at the forefront of new and contemporary design but it was met with both praise and criticism. The exhibitions often evoked a strong response, for example, one visitor's shock at seeing a petrol pump in a museum of applied arts. *The Observer* described the Boilerhouse as a strange nether-region declaring "the work of the industrial designer would be sinister were it not mildly ridiculous..." *The Guardian* felt that the exhibitions had been "calculated to distance the public". The strength of critical responses attest to the novelty of showing industrial design in a museum context. But the project also had its supporters. Radio 3's *Critics Forum* described the inaugural exhibition, *Art and Industry* as "very intelligent...a model exhibition".<sup>305</sup>



**Fig. 31:** Petrol pump designed by Elliot Noyes for Mobil in the Boilerhouse exhibition, *Art and Industry*, 1982.

In spite of a mixed critical response, the enormous popularity of the Boilerhouse Project with the public and its success in bringing attention to the importance of the industrial designer was undeniable. The Boilerhouse was a small gallery within a national institution but in terms of visitor

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<sup>305</sup> Stephen Bayley Press Cuttings files, the Design Museum Archives, London.

numbers of 1.5 million, the twenty-three exhibitions it presented over five years proved to be some of the more successful in London. Writing in 2016, Charles Saumarez Smith, Chief Executive of the Royal Academy of Arts (RA), London, recalls the Boilerhouse Project “which was no more than a creative cell in the basement of the V&A where Stephen Bayley held court in a glass office surrounded by piles of magazines” and remembers the exhibitions as being “lively and very inventive.”<sup>306</sup> For Bayley, “they tapped and thereby demonstrated the existence of a massive latent interest in design” supporting Conran’s rationale for a permanent museum devoted to the study of industrial design.<sup>307</sup>

### **3.2 The Design Museum at Shad Thames: Commerce and Culture**

In 1981, Terence Conran led a consortium to win the bid for a mixed-use development at Butler’s Wharf, a thirteen acre site on the south bank of the River Thames. The search for possible locations for the new Design Museum began as early as 1984. In 1986 Conran moved the Boilerhouse Project to the area. The site chosen for the new museum was a derelict 1950s banana-ripening warehouse on the riverfront in a location overlooking Tower Bridge and across from the City of London. The building was converted by Richard Doone of Conran Roche and created space for two floors of exhibition galleries, education and events spaces, as well as a cafe and a restaurant overlooking the river.

Doone devised a scheme that stripped back the brickwork and used the steel structure to create a simple, white walled building with generous balconies that was deliberately reminiscent of the International Style of the 1930s exemplified by the Bauhaus and which stood in direct contrast to the Victorian warehouses along the riverfront. Stephen Bayley later

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<sup>306</sup> Liz Farrelly presents an account of Stephen Bayley’s trajectory from ‘enfant terrible’ and journalist to curator and director of the Boilerhouse Gallery in ‘Media in the Museum: Fashioning the Design Curator at the Boilerhouse Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, London’ in Leah Armstrong and Felice McDowell (eds.), *Fashioning Identities: Identity and Representation at Work in the Creative Industries*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

<sup>307</sup> Tom Wilson, Tom (ed.) *Designs of Our Times: 10 Years of Designs of the Year*, London: the Design Museum, 2017: 29.

recalled that people would often refer to the museum as ‘Bauhaus on Thames.’ Barbara Usherwood’s detailed description of the Design Museum in 1991 describes the renovated warehouse in Shad Thames as a skin-deep simulacrum of modernism with ocean-liner decks, a faux corporate reception desk and pristine marble and white interiors.<sup>308</sup>



**Fig. 32:** 1. The Design Museum prior to refurbishment in 1986; 2. Following refurbishment in 1989.

An early promotional brochure produced by the Design Museum set out a bold ambition for the new museum:-

“In a building of outstanding architectural character and quality on a remarkable site close to London’s financial centre, the Design Museum will offer a range of resources which designers, industry and business may draw on to create better products, while providing a stimulating environment in which to view, experience and evaluate design. When the Design Museum opens in Spring 1989 it will take the concept of the museum out of the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first century.”<sup>309</sup>

The brochure states that the museum would house a permanent study collection of noteworthy design from the industrial revolution to the age of electronics with products supported by information about marketing, materials and performance which enables an object to be understood in context. In 1989, in his regular editorial column in *Blueprint*, Deyan Sudjic praised Bayley’s approach pointing out that many institutions show objects

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<sup>308</sup> Barbara Usherwood, ‘The Design Museum: Form Follows Funding’, *Design Issues* Vol.7 No.2, 1991: 76-87.

<sup>309</sup> The Conran Foundation, The Design Museum at Butler’s Wharf promotional brochure, undated, the Design Museum Archives, London.

as art, whereas Stephen Bayley wanted to put objects into context.<sup>310</sup>

Drawing on the experience of the Foundation's successful Boilerhouse Project in the V&A, the new Design Museum would provide a unique range of resources for students, professional designers, industry and commerce. In its permanent collection, temporary exhibitions, continuously changing reviews, lecture programmes and study facilities, the Design Museum recognises that "industry is our culture."<sup>311</sup> It was recognised that design was not one subject, but many - furniture, packaging, office equipment, transport and leisure. Disciplines included materials science, ergonomics, mechanical engineering and styling, the range of expression covered elegance, utility, function, and fashion.

From the beginning, the museum was deliberately international in outlook. In 1988 Conran and Bayley set up an International Advisory Council. The participants included directors of design institutions such as the Design Arts Programme at the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt, the Taideteollisuusmuseo in Helsinki and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York.<sup>312</sup> By so doing, it was hoped that the museum would be able to benefit from best practice in Europe and the US. The role of the council was to advise on themes, issues and developments in design that might influence the exhibition and education programmes at the new museum. The first meeting of the Council took place on 12 April 1988 with the purpose of briefing members about plans for the new museum and an opportunity to discuss every aspect of its programme with the director and staff. In addition, the Design Museum invited to the meeting two British designers, Dinah Casson and Richard Seymour, and a writer on architecture and design, Deyan Sudjic, then editor of *Blueprint* magazine who would become a future director of the museum.

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<sup>310</sup> Deyan Sudjic, Editorial, *Blueprint*, July / August 1989.

<sup>311</sup> Stephen Bayley, Design Museum Hymn Sheet, 24 June 1987, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>312</sup> Design Museum International Advisory Council, First Meeting: Agenda and briefing notes, 12 April 1988, the Design Museum Archives, London.

From the outset, the Design Museum was vocal about its position as an independent institution whose purpose was “to increase public understanding of industrial society through the study of the artefacts it produces.”<sup>313</sup> It was also clear that it would not endorse a notion of good design or taste, in an attempt to distance itself from the position communicated at the Boilerhouse and to establish the museum as an independent institution:-

“The Design Museum does not therefore exist to legitimate a specific notion of ‘good’ design or personal taste. Nor does it endorse a particular aesthetic. Its intellectual vitality depends on being inclusive rather than exclusive. As an independent body it is tied neither to the immediate preoccupations of the design profession nor to government policy.”<sup>314</sup>

Bayley later recalled a memorable dinner with Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street at which she scolded him, "You must not call this a 'museum", considering the term too dead a descriptor for the Conran Foundation's new initiative. According to Bayley he was about to say, "But Prime Minister, we have considered all possible names and, notwithstanding the unfortunate antiquarian associations for so thrusting and relevant a subject, we feel 'museum' is best since it drags design into the arena of culture where we think it should be." Bayley recalls that he never got to finish the sentence as Thatcher said, "Don't 'but' me, young man."<sup>315</sup> The incident did not dissuade her from agreeing to open the Design Museum on 5 July, 1989.

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<sup>313</sup> Positioning paper, The Design Museum, February 1989, the Design Museum Archives, London.

<sup>314</sup> Positioning paper, The Design Museum, February 1989, the Design Museum Archives London.

<sup>315</sup> Stephen Bayley, 'Behind the Scenes at the Museum', *The Independent*, 17 September 2006. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/behind-the-scenes-at-the-museum-415998.html> (Accessed 9.04.17).





**Fig. 33:** Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at the opening of the Design Museum, 5 July 1989

The invitation to the opening party of the Design Museum carried the headline; “Can a function follow form.” It took the form of an advertisement that explained that design and advertising were connected through mass-market consumption; “Like design, advertising is involved with the mass-market, but like the Design Museum, this advertisement is unique.” heralding a new type of museum and visitor experience.<sup>316</sup>

The first exhibition, *Commerce and Culture: From Pre-Industrial Art to Post-Industrial Value*, set the agenda for the new Design Museum. In a foreword to the accompanying exhibition catalogue, Design Museum Director Stephen Bayley asserted that commerce and culture were not separate entities but were all one, stating:-

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<sup>316</sup> Invitation to the opening of the Design Museum, 5 July 1989, the Design Museum Archives, London.



“Our modern muses are commerce, industry and technology, and we’re trying to make a home for them...Commerce and culture are all part of the same thing. The only difference between a museum and a department store is that in one of them, the goods are for sale.”<sup>317</sup>

The exhibition included full-scale reconstructions of the entrances to an American shopping mall, a Corinthian-style column from the Earls Court Sainsbury *Homebase* store together with Brucciani’s gallery of casts from the V&A. Now that they were free from the institutional shackles of the V&A, the exhibitions at the new Design Museum were able to depart from what was presented at the earlier Boilerhouse and could now more explicitly embrace commerce.



**Fig 34:** Display panel in the opening exhibition, *Commerce and Culture* at the Design Museum, 1989

Through its temporary exhibitions programme, permanent collection and learning programme, the new Design Museum focused attention on the cultural value of design and began to develop an audience for the subject. The earlier Boilerhouse Project at the V&A and the Design Museum at Butler’s Wharf offered independent spaces in which to think seriously about design and to communicate its value in the broadest cultural sense.

<sup>317</sup> Stephen Bayley, *Commerce and Culture: From Pre-Industrial Art to Post-Industrial Value*, London: Design Museum, 1989.

This continuing debate has, over time, informed the mission of the institution and underpinned curatorial approaches. An analysis of official documents produced by the Design Museum between 1989 and 2017, including press releases, monthly Bulletins, Annual Reports and Corporate Plans, reflect changing mission statements and programming policies. Writing in 1988 at a time when many more museums were being launched or reinventing themselves, a development discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2), Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler's research identified that museums were starting to develop mission statements to more clearly define their functions, roles and purpose.<sup>318</sup> Over time, they can also be interpreted as markers in the Design Museum's development, reflecting gradual shifts in thinking and strategic direction.

### **3.3 The Early Exhibitions**

In 1993 Paul Warwick Thompson took up the role of Director at the Design Museum. Thompson was previously curator of the Review Gallery located on the second floor of the museum. Sponsored by the technology company Sony UK, who had been the subject of an earlier exhibition at the Boilerhouse in 1982, the gallery presented a regularly changing display of new products. It was described as the UK's only magazine showcase for the very latest in contemporary design.<sup>319</sup> The Review Gallery presented design as something accessible and purchasable, with the display including details of the designer, manufacturer and price. When Thompson took over, the mission statement of the museum was the following:-

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<sup>318</sup> Neil Kotler and Philip Kotler, *Museum Strategy and Marketing*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1998: 28.

<sup>319</sup> Design Museum Annual Review, 1998, Personal Archive.

“The Design Museum is the first museum of its kind in the world. Through regularly changing exhibitions and displays - which include cars, furniture, domestic appliances, cameras, graphics and ceramics - and our educational activities, the Design Museum offers visitors of all ages a fascinating and accessible introduction to the role of design in our everyday lives from the origins of mass production to the present day.”<sup>320</sup>

Thompson inherited an exhibition programme that was seemingly still very didactic in trying to promote an understanding of the role of design in society. A foyer exhibition, *Ethics and Aesthetics* (12 November - 28 February 1993), examined the pioneering role of Scandinavian design agencies and their efforts at promoting better standards and ‘good design’ at affordable prices. The Review Gallery presented *New Directions in Scandinavian Design* (12 November - 28 February 1993), a broad survey of new consumer products and prototypes in Scandinavian design. In the Collection Gallery, *Design and Mass Production* (From 1 February 1993) showcased the pioneering work of designers such as Josiah Wedgwood, Henry Ford, the Bauhaus and Raymond Loewy. The exhibition explored the technological, sociologic and cultural developments which play a vital role in fostering an understanding of design and mass production. *Ideal Homes* (9 March - 22 August 1993) explored the history of the Ideal Home exhibition and how it promoted the idea of a modern lifestyle influencing the taste and aspirations of its extensive audiences.

In the late 1990s there is a major shift in the museum’s programming with an increasing number of large and small scale international exhibitions. Thompson introduced a combination of monographic and survey shows with the aim of expanding the museum’s audience. These ranged from exhibitions examining individual designers such as Charlotte Perriand, object categories such as bicycles and cars, historical periods such as interwar modernism in Britain and design movements such as the Bauhaus. There were large scale retrospectives of high profile designers covering furniture, product, interior and automotive design. *Charlotte Perriand: Modernist Pioneer* (1996) broke all previous attendance records

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<sup>320</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, January, February, March 1993, Personal Archive.

for the museum; *Ferdinand Porsche: Design Dynasty 1900-1998* (9 April - 31 August 1998) brought together for the first time some of the rarest cars designed by three generations of the Porsche family; *Verner Panton: Light and Colour* (17 June - 10 October 1999) explored the work of the celebrated Danish post-war designer dominated by his groundbreaking use of colour and experimental forms. In the year of the Millennium dome and its controversies, *Buckminster Fuller: Your Private Sky* (2000) presented the visionary designer and inventor's explorations into the geodesic dome. Architecture exhibitions also followed with *Luis Barragan: The Quiet Revolution* (9 March - 8 July 2001) and *Isamu Noguchi* (20 July - 18 November 2001).

Thompson also initiated exhibitions that focused on contemporary designers such as *Paul Smith: True Brit* (1995) and Philippe Starck, provocatively titled *Is Starck a designer?* (1993). *Doing a Dyson* (1996) provided a unique insight into the design process of inventor, designer and entrepreneur James Dyson. *The Real David Mellor* (1998) surveyed the career of the industrial designer from his early silversmithing work to the present day. The museum also staged major survey shows such as *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention* (1998); *Modern Britain: 1929-1939* (20 January - 6 June 1999) and *Bauhaus Dessau* (2000).



**Fig. 35:** *Modern Britain 1929-1939* at the Design Museum, 1999  
Co-curated by James Peto and Donna Loveday. Exhibition design: Foster + Partners. Graphic design: Richard Hollis.

In 1993 a new programme of annual exhibitions was established that focused on the importance of the individual designer for the museum. The annual Conran Foundation Collection exhibition invited an individual associated with design, and chosen by the Conran Foundation, to spend £30,000 on objects that they would like to live with, reflecting their personal opinion of what they found innovative or inspiring in design. The first guest collector was product designer, Ross Lovegrove who purchased a diverse range of items that included an Olympus camera, clothes hangers designed by Konstantin Grcic and a can of Gillette shaving gel. Subsequent guest collectors included industrial designer Jasper Morrison, Dutch design collective Droog Design, journalist Tyler Brul , television presenter Carol Vorderman and garden designer Dan Pearson. The exhibition ran over a period of ten years with the final guest collector being Thomas Heatherwick, after which the programme of exhibitions were brought to an end by Design Museum Director, Alice Rawsthorn.

In 1997 the Design Museum Annual Report documents a new mission

statement for the museum:-

“The Design Museum’s mission is to create a new awareness of design and architecture among the general public. It aims to demonstrate, in a stimulating and accessible manner, how design and the built environment affect the social, cultural and economic well-being of society. It also serves as a national forum of debate for the public, educationalists, government and industry.”<sup>321</sup>

The museum had now expanded its remit to cover design, architecture and the built environment. The mission statement implies a focus on building audiences and a lobbying, campaigning and educative mission. During this period, the museum was involved with organising overseas trade exhibitions in the Gulf states for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) which contributed to raising the profile of the Design Museum overseas. In its Annual Report for 1998, the museum reported that some 22,000 more visitors had come through its doors than during the preceding year (1996/97) which represented a growth of nineteen per cent in admissions income.<sup>322</sup> In the Director’s Report, Thompson claimed that the increase in attendance figures was undoubtedly due to the widening critical acclaim of its temporary exhibition programme and, as discussed in Chapter 1 (1.4), a growing public appetite for design.<sup>323</sup>

Thompson also reported that education visits had increased by eight per cent, building upon the thirty-one per cent increase on the previous year’s figures.<sup>324</sup> This was due to the museum extending its provision of education training nationally both for teachers and students. The museum’s education programme expanded with workshops aimed at all levels of education linked to the National Curriculum and designed to enhance the design skills of young people. It expanded its national framework of Continuing Professional Development training courses aimed at Design & Technology teachers working in primary schools. This development

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<sup>321</sup> Design Museum Annual Report, 1997, Personal Archive.

<sup>322</sup> Design Museum Annual Report, 1998, Personal Archive.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

connects to a new focus on education in museums during the 1980s and 90s and discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2).

The clearest example of the museum's commitment to design education was the opening of a dedicated education space on the second floor of the museum in 1998. The Dyson Centre for Design Education and Training was made possible by a donation from industrial designer and entrepreneur James Dyson. Opened by the Rt. Hon. Chris Smith MP, the purpose of the new space was to accommodate the increasing numbers of education groups visiting the museum.

A year later, the Design Museum's mission statement has radically changed. The Annual Report for 1998 carries the following:-

"To inform, excite and educate on design."<sup>325</sup>

This statement represents a major shift in thinking and policy. It is dramatically shorter than previous mission statements and notable is the use of the word 'excite' alongside education. The focus is now very much on design with the word, architecture removed from the statement. The museum is positioning itself as a provider of information and education but also as the creator of a stimulating environment in which to experience design. It implies that the audience and the provision of a visitor experience is central to the museum's thinking, reflecting the broader shifts in audience engagement implemented by museums discussed in Chapter 2.

In the same year, the Design Museum published *20th Century Design*. Authored by Catherine McDermott, the museum's consultant curator, it was a survey of the most important and influential designs from the century spanning a range of design disciplines.<sup>326</sup> A large number of the objects that feature in the book formed part of the Design Museum's permanent collection and could be viewed in floor to ceiling glass display

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<sup>325</sup> Design Museum Annual Report, 1998, Personal Archive.

<sup>326</sup> Catherine McDermott, *20th Century Design*, London: Carlton Books, 1997.

cases on the second floor of the museum and which were displayed according to type. Whilst many objects were behind glass, there was a gradual shift towards putting objects on open display. Reproductions of chairs from the museum's collection were displayed close to the collection showcases. The space, which became known as *Chair Alley*, invited visitors to sit on the chairs to physically experience new designs and modern reissues of famous chairs, to assess aspects such as styling, comfort and practicality.

In its tenth anniversary year, the museum's mission statement remained the same but a significant development was the appointment of James Dyson as chairman of the Trustees, succeeding the Museum's founder, Terence Conran. Like Conran, Dyson offered an entrepreneurial background as a British inventor, industrial designer and founder of the Dyson company. In the Chairman's foreword in the Annual Report for 1999, Dyson articulates a clear agenda for the museum describing it as one of Britain's most innovative educational institutions:-

"The debates raised over the past ten years within the Design Museum's education and curatorial programmes are the key debates of our age, concerned with the process of designing and making better products, services and environments, creating a better educated workforce and a knowledge-driven economy; celebrating innovation and success; and creating an enhanced quality of life."<sup>327</sup>

In a Corporate Plan written towards the end of Thompson's tenure as Director and covering the period 1999 to 2003, the strategic vision of the Design Museum is now linked to a clear set of values. The aim is to establish the Design Museum as the pre-eminent public venue and educational institution for design. This would be achieved through a number of strategic objectives which included contributing to national policies for design and the creative industries.<sup>328</sup>

In 2001 the museum launched jointly with Kingston University its first

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<sup>327</sup> Design Museum Annual Report, 1999, Personal Archive.

<sup>328</sup> Design Museum Corporate Plan, 1993-2003, the Design Museum Archives, London.



postgraduate programme, an MA in Curating Contemporary Design.<sup>329</sup> The course, discussed more fully in Chapter 1 (1.6), was designed to provide theoretical and practical experience to enable students to work in this newly developing field. The establishment of the training programme represents a clear acknowledgement that design had developed a substantial audience for the subject and required specialist curators who could interpret and communicate contemporary design to an expanding audience.

### 3.4 New Policies and Programmes

In 2001 Alice Rawsthorn, a former *Financial Times* journalist and Design Museum Trustee, succeeded Paul Thompson as Director. Unlike Thompson, Rawsthorn had no previous experience as a curator and her tenure marked a step change in the way the museum communicated design and presented itself.

The exhibition programme continued a focus on contemporary designers and design studios with a programme of retrospectives on leading contemporary designers such as *Jasper Morrison: A World without Words* (11 May - 12 August 2001); *The Peter Saville Show* (23 May - 14 September 2003); *Marc Newson* (23 October 2004 - 30 January 2005) *Eileen Gray* (17 September 2005 - 8 January 2006) and *Alan Fletcher: Fifty years of work (and play)* (11 November 2006 - 18 February 2007). Rawsthorn initiated the first solo exhibitions of emerging designers, *Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec: The Fabulous Bouroullec Boys* (1 February - 16 June 2002); *Hella Jongerius* (5 July - 26 October 2003) and *Zest for Life: Fernando and Humberto Campana* (19 June - 19 September 2004). In 2002 Rawsthorn introduced a new strand into the exhibition programme, the subject of fashion, with an exhibition on the London-based milliner, Philip Treacy.

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<sup>329</sup> *Curating Contemporary Design: Definitive Field Document*, Faculty of Design, Kingston University, June 2000, MA CCD course files, the Design Museum Archives, London.

Fashion's place in the museum has traditionally been viewed with suspicion. Fashion historian Amy de la Haye's analysis of correspondence from the V&A archives clearly show the museum's early anxiety about exhibiting contemporary fashion. In 1972, G.F.W. Digby, Head of the Textiles department at the V&A, writing to the V&A Director Sir John Pope-Hennessy stated:-

“If fashion is to play a part in the museum, I think it should not be done at the expense of the other and more serious activities of the Textile Department.”<sup>330</sup>

In 1970 in a letter from the V&A director Sir John Pope-Hennessy to the portrait photographer Cecil Beaton concerning a fashion exhibition he was curating for the V&A, *Fashion: An anthology by Cecil Beaton*, he urges, “I think the focus of the exhibition should not be fashion (which is a pretty generic thing) but dresses chosen as works of art by you.” This was the first major fashion exhibition at the V&A and, in spite of initial reservations, attracted more than 90,000 visitors.<sup>331</sup>

Twenty-five years later in 1996, the first Biennale of Fashion was set up in Florence by Germano Celant, Luigi Settembrini and Ingrid Sischy. In their introduction to the comprehensive volumes that accompanied the events they level a direct accusation at museums and their reluctance to stage fashion exhibitions. They write:-

“This spectre is evoked precisely by the inertia and apartheid of the museum as an institution, as opposed to the dynamic freedom of movement of modern society...the museum has always erected a double fire-wall against fashion: one of time and the other of status.”<sup>332</sup>

Over the last twenty years, there has been a marked increase in the number of exhibitions devoted to fashion alongside a more vigorous

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<sup>330</sup> Judith Clark and Amy De La Haye, *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971*, Yale University Press, 2014: 69.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*: 69-70.

<sup>332</sup> *Il Tempo e la Moda* (Time and Fashion), Skira Editore, Milan, 1996: 10, quoted in Judith Clark and Amy De La Haye, *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971*, Yale University Press, 2014: 126.

debate around the subject. In 2005 a feature on curating in Museum's Journal, the trade journal for UK museums, noted:-

"A subject that is increasingly coming up for museums is intellectual engagement with fashion curation. The cultural currency has risen dramatically in the past ten years as more international museums and art galleries have begun hosting exhibitions on the subject. Simultaneously, academics have begun to treat it as a significant cultural force, allowing a "new" history of fashion to evolve."<sup>333</sup>

The establishment of a masters programme in Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion (LCF), University of the Arts London responded to a growing interest in, and development of a pedagogy around the subject, both practice-based and theoretical. This increasing interest in the fashion exhibition as a subject of study reflects a rapid acceleration for the discipline which for years struggled to gain the intellectual standing of other creative subjects within the museum and academic fields. Caroline Evans, professor of fashion history and theory at Central Saint Martins, referred to the early reactions in contemporary publishing to the subject of fashion history when only a few books existed on the subject:-

"Some people were really hostile because they thought it was pretentious to talk about fashion in that way...Fashion people were all very suspicious of anyone trying to write a history at all."<sup>334</sup>

It was museum curators James Laver (1899-1975), Keeper of Prints, Drawings and Paintings at the V&A between 1938 and 1959; Doris Langley Moore (1902-1989), Founder of the Costume Museum in Bath and Anne Buck (1910-2005), Keeper of the Gallery of English Costume at Platt Hall, Manchester between 1947 and 1972 who reflected in writing on their curatorial preoccupations. They are credited with doing much to establish the discipline and elevate the museological and academic status of fashion history and curatorship. Since 2000, the surge of fashion-related exhibitions in the UK proves that museums have been compelled to

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<sup>333</sup> Florence Waters, 'The Clothes Shows', *Museums Journal*, March 2015: 24-29.

<sup>334</sup> Interview with Caroline Evans, 'How the theatre of fashion has evolved', *Dazed and Confused*, 5 September 2013. Available at: <http://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/16875/1/how-the-theatre-of-fashion-has-evolved> (Accessed 13.10.16).

respond to the overwhelming popularity, and demand for fashion, in the context of the museum.

In 2002, the Design Museum's first fashion exhibition, *When Philip met Isabella: Philip Treacy's Hats for Isabella Blow* (5 July - 27 October) presented a selection of spectacular hats designed by Treacy and inspired by his friend and muse, the fashion director Isabella Blow. The exhibition showcased their unique creative collaboration through an immersive environment with specially commissioned artwork and film. The exhibition subsequently toured to ten museums and galleries worldwide over a ten year period. The success of this exhibition led to the establishment of an international touring programme at the Design Museum.

The following year, in 2003, an exhibition on the shoe designer, *Manolo Blahnik* (1 February - 11 May) presented a chronology of his designs and design process within a structure of walls made up of hundreds of Blahnik shoe boxes. In the same year, *Unseen Vogue: The Secret History of Fashion Photography* (1 November 2002 - 23 February) told the history of fashion photography drawing on the thousands of images held in the Vogue archive. Following the success of exhibitions on designers Treacy and Blahnik, fashion became a regular part of the Design Museum's programme, perhaps demonstrating a growing awareness by the museum that fashion is popular. It has the potential to reach a broad audience, it can also generate extensive media coverage and substantial visitor numbers.

Rawsthorn also responded to a key development in the museum sector linked to a shifting funding landscape and the need for museums to become more commercially driven, as discussed in Chapter 2 (2.4). During the early 2000s the V&A and the Tate had successfully developed new brand identities as a means of broadening their appeal and attracting more visitors to their institutions. In 2000, the Tate Gallery underwent a major re-branding with the opening of the Gallery of Modern art and the

redevelopment of the Millbank site. The new identity, designed by Marina Warner at Wolff Olins, carried across all four gallery sites influencing the design of its posters, website, publications and shops.<sup>335</sup> As the agency explained, “We designed a range of logos that move in and out of focus, suggesting the dynamic nature of Tate - always changing but always recognisable.”<sup>336</sup> The new identity helped Tate to become one of the most recognised and celebrated global cultural brands.<sup>337</sup>

In 2003 Rawsthorn commissioned the graphic design consultancy, Graphic Thought Facility (GTF), to create a new graphic identity for the Design Museum which included a new logo and a unique typeface specially created for the museum, DM Schulbuch. When commissioning the identity, Rawsthorn is reported to have asked for something “more engaging, dramatic and provocative” to reflect the institution’s own eclectic definition of design.<sup>338</sup>



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<sup>335</sup> Brand New web archive, 27 June 2016. Available at: [https://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/new\\_logo\\_and\\_identity\\_for\\_tate\\_by\\_north.php/](https://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/new_logo_and_identity_for_tate_by_north.php/) (Accessed 30.03.17).

<sup>336</sup> Wolff Olins web archive. Available at: <https://www.wolffolins.com/case-studies/tate/> (Accessed 30.03.17).

<sup>337</sup> In 2017 Tate introduced a revised identity designed by London-based graphic design consultancy North. The new identity coincided with the opening of a new building for Tate Modern designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron and which opened on 17 June 2017.

<sup>338</sup> Graphic Thought Facility web archive. Available at: <http://www.graphicthoughtfacility.com> (Accessed 30.03.17).

**Fig. 36:** The new identity commissioned from GTF in 2003.

GTF worked with illustrator Kam Tang, juxtaposing simple typography with an exuberant and flexible array of line illustrations, suggestive of the various disciplines, genres and ‘isms’ of design. The new identity was used in signage throughout the museum and in all museum communications such as press releases and bulletins. The annual *Designer of the Year* competition, introduced by Rawsthorn in 2003, used the Design Museum’s new identity up until 2007. The 2006 exhibition saw Kam Tang’s illustrations cut from laminated wall panels and reconfigured as a kinetic mobile at the entrance to the exhibition.



**Fig. 37:** The ground floor cafe at the Design Museum showing the new Design Museum identity. Graphic design by GTF, 2003.

During the early 2000s promotional literature produced by the museum reveals a different strategy for the way in which the exhibitions were communicated. Exhibition titles and descriptions were designed to capture headlines. A ‘Coming soon’ was added to the end of the monthly bulletins in an attempt to promote forthcoming exhibitions and generate

anticipation. The museum also started to engage with digital platforms and utilise the potential of social media. The Design Museum website was relaunched and included an archive, *Design at the Design Museum* where online visitors could learn more about the designers, architects and technologies featured at the Design Museum.<sup>339</sup>

Rawsthorn also provided increased visibility for the work of emerging product, furniture, lighting and technology designers. *Great Brits* (14 April - 18 April 2005) was organised in collaboration with the British Council during the Milan Furniture Fair and held at Paul Smith's new Milan headquarters.<sup>340</sup> Billed as "the future superstars of British design", the designers Mathias Bengtsson, Tord Boontje, Daniel Brown and Sam Buxton were given an unprecedented opportunity to showcase their work. The following year, designers Pascal Anson, Michael Cross and Julie Mathias, Julia Lohmann, Matthias Megyeri and Peter Traag were invited to participate.

Rawsthorn also introduced a number of strategies designed to attract sponsorship and increase visitor numbers. Automotive exhibitions continued to feature in the museum's programme as a way of communicating the role of design and engineering but also to attract a wider audience, such as *When Flaminio Drove to France: Flaminio Bertoni's designs for Citroen* (1 August - 12 October 2003) and *The E-Type - Story of a British Sports Car* (1 August - 28 November 2004). They were increasingly employed as a means to attract corporate sponsorship with *Aston Martin V12 Vanquish* (13 July- 28 August 2001) marking the launch of a new Aston Martin and *Ford Thunderbirds* (5 July - 8 September 2002) celebrating the latest reincarnation of the original 1950s T-Bird.

The success of the exhibition programme, together with an expanding

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<sup>339</sup> Design Museum Annual Report, 2003, Personal Archive.

<sup>340</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, February to May 2003, Personal Archive.

audience, highlighted a need for increased space for exhibitions and events. In July 2001 the Design Museum Tank was unveiled, described as a 'baby' glass gallery on the riverside terrace. Located in a busy public area, it was designed to exhibit a rapidly changing programme of site specific installations and to encourage passers-by to enter the museum. The floor to ceiling glass display cases that had dominated the second floor gallery of the museum since 1989 were dismantled to allow for an expanded exhibition space. The collection objects were removed from display and put into storage. This controversial move was presented as an opportunity. The museum's quarterly Bulletin stated, "Like many museum collections, the Design Museum's is too big to be shown all at once. By exhibiting snapshots of the Collection in thematic displays, the museum paints a compelling picture of how new materials and technologies have influenced the development of twentieth and twenty-first century design and its impact on people's daily lives."<sup>341</sup> *Designing Modern Britain* (3 December 2005 - 25 February 2007) was one such exhibition that drew on the Design Museum collection celebrating the achievements of British designers, as well as international designers working in Britain, from London Transport in the 1930s to ambitious plans for the 2012 Olympic Games.

In 2004 a new talks space was opened at the Design Museum. Formerly the staff offices, the Design Museum Space was located on the first floor of the museum with riverfront views. The space was funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and enabled the museum to expand its adult learning programme of talks and debates and also provide much-needed revenue. In the new talks space, the first line-up of speakers included Oscar-winning art director Ken Adam, Design Museum founder Terence Conran, Ian Callum, design director at Jaguar and product designer Marc Newson. This development marks the beginning of a Public Programme at the museum and connects to a broader shift in museums expanding their activities. As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.3), the public programme provided different modes of

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<sup>341</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, Winter 2003, Personal Archive.



engagement with design practice and practitioners. Such discursive platforms generated new audiences for museums and, in turn, created new roles for the curator.

In 2003 Rawsthorn introduced *Designer of the Year*, a new national award sponsored by *The Times* with a cash prize of £25,000. The award embraced every area of design, from cars and graphics, to web sites and consumer goods and celebrated the UK designer or design team that made the biggest contribution to design in the preceding year. Interviewed in 2004 about the award, Rawsthorn said:-

“We wanted to launch an award to celebrate the UK’s design talent. We hope it will raise public awareness of design, just as the Turner Prize has with contemporary art.”<sup>342</sup>

In the first year the shortlist and exhibition comprised jewellery designer Solange Azagury-Partridge, product designer Tord Boontje, Jonathan Ive, vice president of industrial design at Apple and Rockstar Games, creators of *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. At a lavish awards ceremony staged at the Design Museum and televised by BBC2, Jonathan Ive was announced the winner by Oscar winning production designer Ken Adam. In 2004 the shortlist included digital designer, Daniel Brown, product designers Sam Buxton and Paul Cockledge and Craig Johnston, a former professional footballer nominated for designing a high performance football boot called ‘The Pig’. The establishment of the exhibition and awards reflected a rising interest in design by the public and the media and the museum positioning itself as a national institution for contemporary design.

The decision to award the 2005 *Designer of the Year* to social entrepreneur Hilary Cottam sparked controversy. In 2004, the staging of an exhibition on the floral arranger *Constance Spry: A millionaire for a few pence* (17 September - 28 November 2004) had also caused

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<sup>342</sup> Hilary Rose, ‘Masters of Invention’, *The Sunday Times* magazine, 21 February 2004: 38-43.

consternation amongst museum trustees. Rawsthorn's claim that "our homes would look very different without Constance Spry"<sup>343</sup> was in direct opposition to the views of Conran who saw the exhibition as "off the radar" and a betrayal of the founding principles of the museum.<sup>344</sup> James Dyson, Chair of the museum's trustees, claimed that it privileged style over design and debased their interpretation of design as a problem-solving activity, rooted in technology.<sup>345</sup> The exhibition sparked fresh debates on the meaning of design. Deborah Sugg Ryan has explored the debate in depth and records more than forty newspaper and magazine articles published in response to what was a very small, last minute, low-budget exhibition about the mid-century taste-maker, Constance Spry. It also reflected the continued dominance of industrial design in the museum and resulted in some very public tensions between the museum trustees and the Director.<sup>346</sup> The controversy led to Dyson's resignation as Chair of the trustees and Rawsthorn's eventual departure from the museum.

Rawsthorn's tenure represented a new direction for the museum. With a journalist's awareness, she brought cutting-edge contemporary design and fashion into the exhibition programme to attract media and public attention. She was undeniably successful in raising the museum's profile in the media and increasing annual visitor figures, by twenty per cent to over 150,000.<sup>347</sup> It can be argued she helped to popularise design and the

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<sup>343</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, Summer 2004, Personal Archive.

<sup>344</sup> Terence Conran: 'Letters: Concepts of Design', *The Guardian*, 5 October 2004.

<sup>345</sup> Jonathan Glancy, 'Dyson resigns seat at the Design Museum', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2004.

<sup>346</sup> The rift between the director and trustees generated many column inches in the national press which included the following:-  
Jonathan Glancy, 'Dyson resigns seat at the Design Museum', *The Guardian*, 28 September 2004;  
Terence Conran: 'Letters: Concepts of Design', *The Guardian*, 5 October 2004;  
Stephen Bayley, 'Focus: `You know where you can stick these', *Independent on Sunday*, 3 October 2004;  
Deyan Sudjic, 'How a flower arrangement caused fear and loathing', *The Observer*, 3 October 2004.

<sup>347</sup> Design Museum Annual Report, 2005, Personal Archive.

increased visitor figures are an endorsement of her exhibitions policy. But her actions also attracted strong criticism. Former Design Museum Director, Stephen Bayley, was one of her fiercest critics and later commented:-

“Suddenly, the Design Museum was blasted by the gusts of fashion, fame and celebrity. And the ghosts of Ruskin and Morris left the premises.”<sup>348</sup>

### **3.5 Making the Design Process Explicit: *Designs of the Year* and *Designers in Residence***

Deyan Sudjic, a design critic, editor and curator, became Director of the Design Museum in 2006. Sudjic’s ambition was to introduce a Kunsthalle model, drawing on a format for showing art made popular in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, in which the entire building was devoted to a rolling programme of exhibitions. Sudjic began with a series of monographic profiles that examined the role of the industrial designer. *Luigi Colani: Translating Nature* (5 March - 17 June 2007); *Ettore Sottsass: Work in Progress* (29 March - 10 June 2007); *Less and More: The Design Ethos of Dieter Rams* (18 November 2009 - 14 March 2015); *Kenneth Grange: Making Britain Modern* (20 July - 30 October 2011) and *Wim Crouwel: A graphic odyssey* (30 March - 3 July 2011), a major retrospective of the work of the Dutch graphic designer. *Terence Conran: The way we live now* (16 November 2011 - 4 March 2012) coincided with Conran’s eightieth birthday and, as founder of the Design Museum, celebrated his contribution to, and influence on the world of design.

In addition to monographic shows, a number of large-scale survey and thematic exhibitions were introduced to the programme beginning with *Design Cities* (5 September 2008 - 4 January 2009) which told the story of seven cities that changed the world of design at special moments in their history, starting with London in 1851, Vienna of 1908, Dessau in 1924, Paris in 1931, Los Angeles in 1940s, Milan in 1950s, Tokyo in the 1980s, before returning to London in the 2000s.

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<sup>348</sup> Stephen Bayley, ‘Behind the Scenes at the Museum’, *The Independent*, 17 September 2006. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/behind-the-scenes-at-the-museum-415998.html> (Accessed 9.04.17).

The most significant new addition to the exhibition programme was architecture. As discussed earlier in the chapter, and evidenced by the changing mission statements of the museum, architecture had fallen in and out of the museum's focus. At a symposium organised by Kingston University and the Design Museum in 2008, Sudjic introduced the Design Museum's approach to exhibiting architecture.<sup>349</sup> He defended the monographic show, stressing that the dearth of architectural exhibitions has meant that the public still needed to be introduced to the work of architects such as David Chipperfield and John Pawson. He suggested that museums needed to find new and innovative ways to reach those who did not understand how to read an architectural drawing or who had little knowledge of, or interest in, the subject. As Sudjic explained:-

“The Design Museum sees the way open to take on a wider role, to move from a successful niche to a broader definition of a museum dedicated to architecture...The museum is seeking to identify the kinds of shows and approaches that allow it to reach out to an audience of the unconverted.”<sup>350</sup>

The first architecture exhibition introduced to the museum by Sudjic was *Zaha Hadid: Architecture and Design* (29 June - 25 November 2007). It was the first full-scale exhibition of Hadid's work in the UK and one of the most ambitious staged at the museum. It featured a wide range of media including painting, sketches, models, furniture and design objects, spanning two floors of the museum. The architect's process was examined with an in-depth analysis of the planning behind a recently completed project, the Maxxi Centre for Contemporary Art in Rome. An immersive environment designed by Zaha Hadid architects featured a series of floor to ceiling projections that covered an entire wall of the gallery presenting images of major architectural projects, with 'fly-throughs' designed to take the viewer through the finished buildings. This display technique created a visitor experience with a specific purpose. It was intended to move away

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<sup>349</sup> *Representing Architecture: New discussions - ideologies, techniques, curation* comprised of three workshops at the Design Museum in 2008, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

<sup>350</sup> Penny Sparke and Deyan Sudjic, *Representing Architecture: New discussions - ideologies, techniques, curation*, London: Design Museum, 2008: 19-20.

from the traditional format of displaying physical architectural models and plans and enable visitors to digitally experience the internal spaces of Hadid's architecture. This curatorial approach represented a new way of presenting architecture in the gallery space and connects to a broader shift in museums to more experience-based exhibitions, discussed in Chapter 2 (2.7).



**Fig. 38:** *Zaha Hadid: Architecture and Design* at the Design Museum, 2007. Curated by Sophie McKinley. Exhibition and Graphic design: Zaha Hadid Architects.

The Hadid exhibition was followed by other exhibitions celebrating contemporary architects; *Jean Prouve - The poetics of the technical object* (7 December 2007 - 25 March 2008); *Richard Rogers + Architects: From the house to the city* (24 April - 25 August 2008); *Remembering Jan Kaplicky - Architect of the future* (1 July - 1 November 2009); *David Chipperfield: Architecture and the strength of limits* (21 October 2009 - 31 January 2010) and *John Pawson: Plain Space* (22 September 2010 - 30 January 2011). Rogers, Chipperfield and Pawson were later selected to join the shortlist of architects to refurbish the new Design Museum in Kensington, west London with John Pawson eventually selected by museum trustees to design the new building.

The line up of architects to design the new museum did not go unnoticed by critics. Rowan Moore writing in *The Observer* in 2010, commented that the choice of Pawson was troubling because it seemed to form part of a pattern. In recent years the Design Museum had presented work by Javier Mariscal, Jan Kaplický, Dieter Rams, David Chipperfield, Paul Smith, Ettore Sottsass, Richard Rogers and John Pawson. As Moore noted, all had featured on the front cover of *Blueprint* magazine in the 1980s and early 90s, when Sudjic was editor:-

“All are important designers and architects deserving of Design Museum exhibitions...but the preponderance of old cover stars adds up to a conservative trend that leaves too little space for a wider, richer range of contemporary architecture and design. As a result, the Design Museum feels less lively and essential than it should.”<sup>351</sup>

In 2008, Sudjic took the decision to replace the *Designer of the Year* award initiated by his predecessor Alice Rawsthorn, with *Designs of the Year*, an annual exhibition and awards sponsored by Brit Insurance. The exhibition deliberately moved away from a focus on the designer to the design itself, examining the concept behind it and the innovation represented. In a carefully curated selection of the year’s best designs, the exhibition showcases up to 100 of the most innovative, interesting and forward looking designs from around the world. An external panel of internationally respected critics, practitioners and academics across design are invited to nominate up to five projects across seven categories; Architecture, Transport, Graphics, Interactive, Product, Furniture and Fashion. A jury of professionals representing design and related fields decide on category winners and an overall winner. A public vote runs alongside the jury process and visitors are invited to cast their vote whilst in the exhibition.<sup>352</sup>

The introduction of *Designs of the Year* marks a significant shift given the

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<sup>351</sup> Rowan Moore, 'John Pawson: Plain Space', *The Observer Architecture*, 19 September 2010. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/sep/19/john-pawson-plain-space> (Accessed 12.09.18).

<sup>352</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, Spring 2008, Personal Archive.

museum's history of prioritising individual designers. The exhibition places a special focus on the design process and the outcome of that process, ranging from the conceptual and prototype through to finished works in production. The wide ranging projects chosen as winners of the competition shows how the exhibition acts as a barometer for understanding the breadth, value and impact of design. The first competition was won by the One Laptop per child designed by Yves Behar for Fuseproject. Subsequent winners have included a Barack Obama poster designed by Shepard Fairey (2009), a folding electrical plug designed by Min-Kyu Choi (2010), the Plumen 001 lightbulb by Samuel Wilkinson and Hulger (2011), the London 2012 Olympic torch designed by BarberOsgerby (2012), the website "GOV.UK", designed by the Government Digital Service (2013), the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan designed by architect Zaha Hadid (2014), the Human-Organs-on-Chips designed by Donald Engber and Dan Dongeun Huh which mimics the complex function of living human organs (2015) and the Better Shelter, a flat-pack refugee shelter developed by the Ikea Foundation with UNHCR (2016).<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Tom Wilson (ed.), *Designs of Our Times: 10 Years of Designs of the Year*, London: the Design Museum, 2017.



**Fig. 39:** *Designs of the Year 2016* at the Design Museum. Curated by Gemma Curtin. Exhibition design: All Things.

Further exhibitions were introduced to shine a spotlight on the design and manufacturing process. In 2014 *In the Making* (22 January - 4 May 2014) showcased the work of Ed Barber and Jay Osgerby, the award winning designers of the London 2012 Olympic torch. The designers had a long-held technical curiosity and fascination for the making process, and the exhibition explored unfinished products with industrial objects interrupted at various stages in their manufacturing process.

The Design Museum's commitment to supporting emerging design practice was given a more visible presence by the establishment of a residency programme in 2007.<sup>354</sup> *Designers in Residence* evolved from an earlier exhibition initiated by previous director Alice Rawsthorn, *Design Mart*, which showcased the work of Britain's most innovative young designers at the Design Museum for four days during the London Design Festival each September. The residency programme gives four designers a unique opportunity to develop a new body of work in response to a theme set by the Design Museum's curatorial team. Past themes have

<sup>354</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, Summer 2007, Personal Archive.



included thrift, identity, disruption and migration which, according to the Design Museum, capture some of “the prevailing themes in contemporary design culture.”<sup>355</sup> The residents are given access to a dedicated design studio on the top floor of the museum to develop and exhibit their work, and are provided with a bursary and production budget to realise their projects. The programme provides young designers with time and space to research and consider new ways of developing their work. The programme includes a series of events and talks, offering the designers the opportunity to interact and engage with the public, whilst using this platform as a test-bed for ideas, designs and innovations. The studio is managed in a way to ensure it is a productive space for the designers to work, however there are also regular ‘open studio’ sessions, where visitors are encouraged to directly engage with the residents and their projects.



**Fig. 40:** *Designers in Residence 2015* at the Design Museum. Curated by Margaret Cubbage.

The *Designers in Residence* programme is now a key strand of the museum's programme offering visitors to the museum a direct engagement with designers and the design process. It connects to a key

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<sup>355</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, Summer 2007, Personal Archive.

shift towards integrated programming and more process-based activities in curatorial practice, discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2).

The establishment of annual exhibitions such as *Designs of the Year* and *Designers in Residence* represent a perceptible shift in the way that the Design Museum communicates design to its audience. It reflects a broader shift more generally as museums find ways to engage more directly with their audiences. The exhibitions bring the designer into the museum and make the design process more explicit. As Helen Charman, former Director of Learning and Research at the museum, has noted, they take the visitor behind the surface to explore the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of design, rather than the ‘who’, and design’s impact in shaping a complex world.<sup>356</sup>

### 3.6 The Changing Role of Education

In 2011 the Design Museum mission statement changes to reflect the changing preoccupations of the museum:-

“The Design Museum provides a critical insight into the forces driving change in today’s world”<sup>357</sup>

The mission statement represents a radical shift in focus for the museum. This is evidenced by addressing new subject areas in the exhibition programme guest curated by leading design practitioners. Curated by Susan Kohn, a metalworker and jewellery designer, *Unexpected Pleasures: The art and design of contemporary jewellery* (5 December 2012 - 3 March 2013) showcased designers who have challenged the conventional understanding of jewellery design. The exhibition, for the first time, brought contemporary craft into the exhibition programme, a subject that had been largely ignored by the museum.

Again in 2013, the Design Museum explored new territory with the emerging discipline of critical or speculative design. *United Micro Kingdoms: A design fiction* (30 January 2012 - 28 April 2013) examined a

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<sup>356</sup> Helen Charman in foreword to Gareth Williams, *Design: An essential introduction*, London: Goodman Field, 2015: 7.

<sup>357</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, October 2012 - March 2013, Personal Archive.

series of speculative futures, showcasing the work of designers and educators Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby. Dunne and Raby who had established the Design Interactions course at the Royal College of Art. Their work weaves speculative narratives around objects and designs that extrapolate current trends and offer witty critical commentaries on contemporary culture. Design critic, Alice Twemlow has described their work as positioned at the intersections of art and design and of industry and academia which, she argues, can make their work challenging territory for a museum.<sup>358</sup>

The Design Museum exhibition, curated by Dunne and Raby, explored the future interface between science, technology and design. It imagined an alternative version of England governed by four extreme lifestyle tribes. The designers devolved the country into four new counties, each conceived as an experimental zone with its own form of governance, economy and lifestyle. Visitors were encouraged to decide which tribe they might want to align themselves with; a Digitalian, driven by a blind faith in technology to join a world where tagging, tracking and total surveillance reign supreme or a Bioliberal in the rural southwest, producing their own energy, growing their own products and driving a farting biogas vehicle. These fantastical worlds were depicted through models and props, arranged on a central table in the exhibition like fragments of evidence from alternative societies. The objects, which ranged from model vehicles to slices of landscape, provided intriguing glimpses into this parallel universe and served as props as a catalyst for the visitor's imagination.” As a review of the exhibition noted, “By suspending reality for a moment and indulging in speculation, with a very English sense of humour, United Micro Kingdoms provides the very lens we need to make our

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<sup>358</sup> Alice Twemlow, *Sifting the Trash: A history of design criticism*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2017: 226.

contemporary social, political and environmental predicament all the more clear. It is beautiful, funny and clever and may just change the way you look at the world.”<sup>359</sup>



**Fig. 41:** *United Micro Kingdoms: A design fiction* at the Design Museum, 2012. Curated by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby.

Dunne and Raby’s belief that design can be a tool to create not only objects but ideas can be seen to support the Design Museum’s aim to provide critical insights into design’s social impact. This shift was also reflected in the museum’s learning programme. Helen Charman, a former Director of Learning and Research at the museum, explains that the programmes were developed to teach design literacy through experiential and contextual approaches which connect learners with multidisciplinary and international designers, design practices and the material culture of design. The programmes were also conceived to promote a critical and reflective approach to individual responsibility both as producer and

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<sup>359</sup> Oliver Wainwright, ‘Are nuclear trains and cars made of skin the future of travel?’, *The Guardian*, 30 April 2013. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2013/apr/30/united-micro-kingdoms-design-museum> (Accessed 13.07.17).

consumer “in a world groaning under the weight of stuff.”<sup>360</sup> As a result of this shift in focus, the learning programme experienced a significant expansion with new programmes created for schools, colleges and further education, in addition to kids activities and weekend workshops. The new programmes moved away from the traditional object handling workshops to activities that brought students closer to design practice and the world of the design studio.

In 2010 the museum launched a major flagship learning project. *Design Ventura* is an opportunity for students to develop design thinking, creativity, business capabilities and employability skills. The project was launched in partnership with Deutsche Bank, as part of the bank’s youth engagement programme, *Born to Be*, and over 47,000 students in 700 schools have participated. Teachers are offered training and resources to develop their own professional practice and to run the project in school with the support of design and business industry experts. Students, working in teams, are asked to consider the whole process of design, from initial ideas, manufacturing and budgets through to marketing and branding. The top ten teams are invited to a pitching event at the Design Museum. The winning team go on to work with a professional design team to develop their idea and see it on sale in the Design Museum Shop.<sup>361</sup>

The project was officially recognised when Catherine Ritman-Smith, a former Learning Producer at the museum and initiator of the project, won the Design Skills category at the 2018 Creative and Cultural Skills Awards which celebrate outstanding commitment to skills development in the creative industries.<sup>362</sup> As a learning programme, *Design Ventura* reinforces the connection between critical thinking, design process and practice. It also reflects the close relationships between design, industry and

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<sup>360</sup> Helen Charman in Foreword to Gareth Williams, *Design: An essential introduction*, London: Goodman Fiell, 2015: 7.

<sup>361</sup> Design Museum - Design Ventura. Available at: <https://ventura.designmuseum.org> (Accessed 15.07.18).

<sup>362</sup> Creative and Cultural Skills Awards. Available at: <https://ccskills.org.uk/supporters/awards>. (Accessed 15.07.18).

commerce, which had been one of the founding principles of the Design Museum.

### **3.7 Experience-Based Exhibitions: *Verner Panton*, *Hussein Chalayan* and *Christian Louboutin***

A new focus on education and audience engagement inspired new curatorial approaches at the museum. A move towards more experience-based exhibitions connected to a broader shift discussed Chapter 2 (2.7). Earlier exhibitions at the museum had first tested this approach. In 1999 an exhibition, *Verner Panton: Light and Colour* (17 June - 10 October 1999) had explored the work of the mid-twentieth century Danish designer. It was conceived in two parts. The first section, designed by Tom Dixon, explored the biography of the designer and featured interiors, furniture, textiles and lighting, placing Panton's work within the context of mid-century Scandinavian design. The second section of the exhibition recreated an immersive, 'hypnotic' installation consisting of eight rooms, each containing only furniture and products of a single colour, and together forming a vivid spectrum of yellow, orange, red, magenta, violet, blue, turquoise and green. The aim of the immersive installation was to communicate Panton's influential colour philosophy, a philosophy that underpinned all of his work. The installation allowed a glimpse inside the designer's mind, not through carefully selected objects placed on plinths and thoughtfully worded captions, but through the sheer exuberance and audacity of the display. Design critic Lesley Jackson reviewing the exhibition for *The Guardian* in 1999 commented; "The recollection of this exhibition has buoyed me up ever since. Now others have the chance to have their minds expanded at the Design Museum, complete with this remarkable installation."<sup>363</sup>

The exhibition demonstrated the potential for exhibitions to employ ideas of immersion and spectacle to engage audiences. This approach

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<sup>363</sup> Lesley Jackson, 'Verner Panton: Light and Colour' Exhibition review, *The Guardian*, 1999, Personal Archive.

connected to developments more generally in museums and to exhibitions that were experimenting with new display strategies to engage audiences.



**Fig. 42:** The colour rooms in *Verner Panton: Light and Colour* at the Design Museum, 1999. Curated by Donna Loveday. Exhibition design: Tom Dixon.

In 2009 the Design Museum staged *Super Contemporary* (3 June - 4 October 2009). The exhibition, curated by Daniel Charny, who had been responsible for establishing the Aram Gallery in 2002, celebrated the creative spirit of London and its reputation as a beacon of design. At the centre of the exhibition were fifteen new commissions from contemporary London-based designers including David Adjaye, Barber Osgerby, Tom Dixon, Thomas Heatherwick and Paul Smith whose brief was to give something back to the city where they made their name. A timeline beginning in the 1960s charted defining moments in the development of design in London mapping the locations of key projects, studios and networks within the city. The timeline had to accommodate a range of material and the method of display chosen was a system of wooden 'tracks' that ran the perimeter of the main gallery. Each track had three parallel grooves allowing facts and figures, caption artwork and objects to be slotted in according to discipline and chronology. The display system



was also used as the basis for all related print material.

**Fig. 43:** *Super Contemporary* at the Design Museum, 2009  
Curated by Daniel Charny. Exhibition design: Martino Gamper. Graphic design: Bibliothèque.

The museum had employed the design device of the timeline in earlier exhibitions. In 2006 the exhibition, *Formula One: The Great Design Race* (1 July - 29 October 2006) had featured a timeline designed by exhibition and graphic designer Morag Myerscough that wrapped around the perimeter walls of the entire gallery. The design device enabled an extensive range of material communicating the history Formula One racing to be displayed. As the co-curator of the exhibition, I saw the potential of the timeline to present a wide range of historical material uncovered during archive research but which would allow the visitor to access selected



material as they moved through the exhibition.



**Fig. 44:** *Formula One: The Great Design Race* at the Design Museum, 2006. Co-curated by Alicia Pivaro and Donna Loveday. Exhibition and Graphic Design: Studio Myerscough.

Two fashion exhibitions created a new type of designed environment at the museum. The exhibition, *Hussein Chalayan: From fashion and back* (22 January - 17 May 2009) was the first comprehensive presentation of Chalayan's work in the UK. Spanning fifteen years of experimental projects, the exhibition explored the designer's creative approach, his inspirations and the many themes which influence his work ranging from genetics and technological progress to displacement, migrancy and cultural identity. Chalayan creates event spaces in the form of films, installations and exhibitions, as well as experimenting with new and innovative materials and techniques with his work extending to conceptual and technological laser and film projects alongside his bi-annual fashion collections.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, November - February 2008, Personal Archive.

The curatorial concept adopted a conceptual approach with a series of immersive installations recreating seminal collections to show how the designer used clothing as a site of exploration, to express concepts and make them accessible to a wider audience. The exhibition environment was conceived as an airline departure lounge, and with the absence of any wall text, visitors were encouraged to move through a series of spaces to fully experience the work presented. An exhibition guide was issued to visitors with information about each of the collections and projects but many preferred to walk through the exhibition before making reference to the guide. The exhibition received critical acclaim and was selected as *Critics Choice* in Time Out for January and March 2009. The Telegraph commented, “this exhibition offers not only a chance to see Chalayan’s daring dresses up close - but also a rare insight into his unusual creative process.”<sup>365</sup>



**Fig. 45:** *Hussein Chalayan; From fashion and back* at the Design Museum, 2009. Curated by Donna Loveday, Exhibition design: Block Architecture, Graphic design: Abake.

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<sup>365</sup> Harriet Quick, ‘From Fashion And Back: Hussein Chalayan's latest exhibition’, *The Telegraph*, 20 January 2009. Available at: <http://fashion.telegraph.co.uk/news-features/TMG4299978/From-Fashion-And-Back-Hussein-Chalayans-latest-exhibition.html> (Accessed 20.10.17)

The exhibition *Christian Louboutin* (1 May - 9 July 2012) adopted a similar experience-based approach. As the curator I decided to appoint design agency, Household, as exhibition designers who specialised in the design of retail interiors and in creating “customer-centric experiences that disrupt.”<sup>366</sup> The exhibition was the first UK retrospective of French shoe designer Christian Louboutin and showcased twenty years of designs and inspiration, revealing the artistry and theatricality of his shoe design from stilettos and lace-up boots to sneakers and bejewelled pumps. Drawing from the designer’s personal archive, the exhibition presented an immersive exhibition environment that examined the many sources of his creativity - shoes inspired by performance, cabaret and the showgirl; fantasy and fairy tale; art and architecture; film; landscape and travel.<sup>367</sup>

The exhibition employed a number of design devices to directly engage the visitor with the designer and his design process. A recreation of Louboutin’s studio in Paris took the visitor through every stage of the design process, revealing how a shoe is constructed, from the initial drawing and first prototype through to production in the factory. At the centre of the exhibition was a 3-D holographic performance by the burlesque performer, Dita von Teese, who appeared to be dancing in the space, the first time this type of technology had been used at the Design Museum. The exhibition went on to break all attendance records at the Design Museum and won a number of awards.<sup>368</sup> In critical reviews of the exhibition, the curator was credited with successfully moving the visitor experience on from a “white box” exhibition to a new inspiring and

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<sup>366</sup> Household web page. Available at: <https://www.household-design.com> (Accessed 20.10.17).

<sup>367</sup> Design Museum Bulletin, October 2011 - March 2012, Personal Archive.

<sup>368</sup> The exhibition was shortlisted for *Best Exhibition Design* at the Design Week Awards 2013, awarded *Best Exhibition Space* at the World Interiors News Awards 2013 and a winner in the category for *Exhibitions and Experiential Environments* at the DBS Design Effectiveness Awards in 2014.

multifaceted journey; “this exhibition challenges convention by combining a retail design approach with art, culture and fashion cues to broaden the audience appeal.”<sup>369</sup>



**Fig. 46:** *Christian Louboutin* at the Design Museum, 2012. Curated by Donna Loveday. Exhibition and graphic design: Household.

Crucially, these exhibitions included elements that featured the designer’s process and professional context as integral dimensions, for example, re-staging the designer’s studio in *Christian Louboutin* and including footage of seminal runway shows in *Hussein Chalayan: From fashion and back*. These aspects of curatorial practice will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4 with a focus on the 2013 exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

### **3.8 The Development of the New Design Museum on Kensington High Street**

In November 2016, London’s Design Museum moved from its former location at Shad Thames in south east London to reopen at the former Commonwealth Institute, on Kensington High Street. The move was first

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<sup>369</sup> *The Christian Louboutin Retrospective Exhibition*, Public document, DBA submission 2013: 2.

proposed some years before, under the directorship of Alice Rawsthorn, when other contenders for a site were considered such as the planned extension for the Tate by Herzog and De Meuron.

In 2012 Design Museum Director, Deyan Sudjic, drafted a positioning paper that proposed a concept for the new museum. In an internal document, *From the City to the Spoon*, Sudjic took the view promoted by Italian architect Ernesto Rogers who believed that close examination of an industrial object reveals so much about the context in which it was produced.<sup>370</sup> Interviewed shortly after taking up his role as Director in 2006, Sudjic stated:-

“I have always been struck by this line from Ernesto Rogers, who said in a provocative essay that if you explore a spoon carefully enough, you can intuit the kind of city that would be built by the intelligence that made it.”<sup>371</sup>

Sudjic’s positioning paper sets out a typical day in the life of the new museum; Thursday 3 August 2012. The day starts at 8am when the museum installation team arrive to put the final touches to a new exhibition, *The Meaning of Jewellery*. At 10am the museum opens to the public and a school party of twenty-five makes their way to the education suite. At 12 noon a group of MA students from Kingston University arrive for a seminar on curating for children. At 6.30pm John Pawson and Calvin Klein arrive to debate the relationship between architecture and fashion in front of an invited audience. The day ends at 8pm when the international board of Herman Miller arrive for a dinner in the event space after a tour of the permanent collection by the director.<sup>372</sup>

The concept document gives a sense of past achievements but also articulates the future for an expanded Design Museum and suggests an

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<sup>370</sup> Ernesto Rogers cited in ‘Pedro Silman: The Blog’. Available at: <http://www.pedrosilmon.com/blog/2017/03/architecture-richard-rogers-on-alvar-aalto/> (Accessed 20.06.17).

<sup>371</sup> Peter Aspden, ‘Blueprint for a new Design Museum’, *Financial Times*, 6 September 2006. Available at: <https://ft.com/content> (Accessed 20.06.17).

<sup>372</sup> Deyan Sudjic, Concept Document for a new Design Museum, 2012, Personal Archive.

expanded programme of activity. The paper was the starting point for museum trustees, staff and, at a later date, the architectural team to be able to plan for a new Design Museum, a process that started in 2010.

In 2010 a partnership formed by Chelsfield and the Ilchester Estate was granted planning permission by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to redevelop the west Kensington site. Permission was given for the construction of three residential buildings and the refurbishment of the Grade II\* listed building located at the centre of the site. Following the terms of a Section 106 agreement that formed part of the planning permission, the Design Museum was granted a 175-year lease of the listed building at a peppercorn rent. The complex renovation of the museum saw OMA led by Reinier de Graaf, Allies and Morrison, Arup and John Pawson work together to bring the former Commonwealth Institute building, a landmark of post-war British architecture, back into use.

Designed by John Pawson and OMA, two basement levels were excavated below the footprint of the original 1960s Grade II listed building, increasing its floor plan from 6,000 square metres to 10,000 square metres. Using radical engineering techniques, the original concrete floors were removed, a process that entailed propping the roof on a temporary steel structure twenty metres above the ground. The original façade was replaced with a double glazed skin, significantly improving insulation standards and allowing daylight into the interior. The new exterior was meticulously detailed to resemble the original blue skin of the building, with matching mullions and a fritted pattern of printed dots. A new public plaza complete with fountains was installed at the entrance to the museum within a landscape designed by West 8.<sup>373</sup>

The renovated building, with its distinctive copper-covered, hyperbolic paraboloid roof, offered three times more space in which to present larger scale exhibitions, a wider range of learning activities and events, and the opportunity to display the museum's collection on the top floor. A carefully

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<sup>373</sup> Tom Wilson, *The Story of the Design Museum*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016: 93.

planned rebranding took the institution's name from "Design Museum" to "the Design Museum - the world's leading museum devoted to contemporary design in every form from architecture and fashion to graphics, product and industrial design."<sup>374</sup>

In published reflections on the making of a new museum, John Pawson explains that an attitude has to be at the heart of a museum of design:-

"The interior architecture must offer the means to circulate, to eat, to buy, to work, to learn and to store but, above all else, it must embody a view of how to place and experience objects in space - objects of diverse scales and typologies, requiring a range of climatic and lighting conditions."<sup>375</sup>

On 24 November 2016, the Design Museum opened in its new home on Kensington High Street, west London. The project was the culmination of a five-year construction process and investment of £83 million.<sup>376</sup> For the museum's founder, Terence Conran, moving the Design Museum to Kensington to the former Commonwealth Institute building, a listed building originally designed by Sir Robert Matthew in the 1960s, was overwhelmingly the most important and exciting achievement of his career:-

"This is our time and this is our big moment. It has allowed all our dreams and ambitions for the museum to come true, creating a world-class space with the size and scope for the serious promotion and celebration of design and architecture in this country."<sup>377</sup>

During the museum's development, a series of meetings were convened with senior staff to debate and discuss the "tone of voice" for the new

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<sup>374</sup> Jessica Mairs, 'London's new Design Museum by John Pawson and OMA unveiled', *Dezeen*, 17 November 2016. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2016/11/17/design-museum-opens-architecture-news-john-pawson-oma-kensington-london-uk/> (Accessed 4.03.18).

<sup>375</sup> Tom Wilson, *The Story of the Design Museum*, London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016: 93.

<sup>376</sup> 'The Design Museum opens in Kensington', Media release, 24 November 2016, the Design Museum archives, London.

<sup>377</sup> Sir Terence Conran, Foreword to *The Story of the Design Museum*, London: Phaidon, 2016: 7.



museum. The resulting discussions formed the focus of an internal document, *Design Museum Vision, Mission, Values & Strategic Objectives*. The paper stated the new vision of the museum to be:-

“We want everyone to understand the value of design.”

with a mission “to create the most inspiring, forward-looking, exciting and engaging design museum in the world.”<sup>378</sup> The mission was accompanied by four core values - Welcoming, Collaborative, Enterprising and Provocative. The visitor, and the end user for design, was now firmly placed at the heart of the museum’s planning and would be at the core of the new museum and all its facilities. As Sudjic later wrote:-

“The Design Museum sees itself as trying to offer some perspective on this rapidly changing landscape. It looks forward, more than to the past. It sees contemporary design and architecture as part of a wider cultural landscape, rather than as the exclusive preserve of the specialist or the professional. Our role is to explore what an object means to the people who use it and make it, as well as what it does and how it is made.”<sup>379</sup>



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<sup>378</sup> *Design Museum Vision, Mission, Values & Strategic Objectives*, April 2012 - November 2014, Design Museum Archive.

<sup>379</sup> ‘Design Museum director Deyan Sudjic: ‘Objects real a lot about the way we live, who we are, what we value’, *The Guardian*, 18 February 2017.



**Fig. 47:** Interior view of the Design Museum, Kensington, 2016.  
Designed by John Pawson and OMA.

### **3.9 A New Exhibitions Focus at the Design Museum: *Fear and Love: Reactions to a Complex World* and *California: Designing Freedom***

With a new and much larger building, the Design Museum put its collection on permanent display on the top floor of the museum and free to visitors. *Designer Maker User*, curated by Senior Curator, Alex Newson, and designed by Studio Myerscough, focused on the process of design and picks up on an earlier focus on making seen in earlier exhibitions at the museum such as *In the Making* (22 January - 4 May 2014). The permanent display aims to provide an introduction to the museum's collection, looking at the development of modern design through these three interconnected roles. It features almost 1,000 items of twentieth and twenty-first century design viewed from the angles of the designer, manufacturer and user, including a crowdsourced wall. The exhibition covers a broad range of design disciplines, from architecture and engineering, to the digital world, fashion and graphics. The permanent exhibition displays designed objects not as a conventional chronology, but in order to offer an insight into the significance of design from three different perspectives, that of the user and the maker, as well as the designer. According to the curator, its aim is to show what a design means, as well as how it is made and to communicate the economic and social processes that underpin it.<sup>380</sup>

The museum's opening exhibition, *Fear and Love: Reactions to a complex world* (24 November 2016 - 23 April 2017) featured a series of newly commissioned works by designers and architects dealing with pressing contemporary topics. The exhibition explored a spectrum of issues including networked sexuality, sentient robots, slow fashion and settled nomads. The exhibition was curated by the museum's Chief Curator,

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<sup>380</sup> Alex Newson, Eleanor Suggest and Deyan Sudjic, *Designer Maker User*, Phaidon Press Ltd, 2016.

Justin McGuirk, who was appointed to the role in 2015. Like Sudjic, McGuirk's background was as a design journalist, having been previously editor of *Icon* magazine.<sup>381</sup> The exhibition presented the proposition that design in the twenty-first century is deeply connected not just to commerce and culture, which had been a focus for the museum in its early years, but to urgent underlying political and social issues that reflect the state of the world. Through the exhibition, McGuirk argued that issues such as sustainability, climate change, anxieties over the spread of surveillance and the growth of digital technology are now central to our understanding of mass-produced objects, and which inspire both fear and love. This position represented a new focus for the Design Museum in aiming to capture the mood of the present and establish the Design Museum as the home of design debate.

In an interview following the opening of the Design Museum in November 2016, McGuirk expressed the view that "we've gone beyond the point of understanding that everything around us is designed, that design is important to the way the world looks and feels." Instead, he wanted to create exhibitions that provoked a broader sense of design's possibilities, processes and impacts:-

"We're saying that design is actually a way of looking at the world generally, and that design has a role to play in bigger issues that go beyond objects."<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Dan Howarth, 'Justin McGuirk appointed chief curator at London's Design Museum', *Dezeen*, 3 August 2015. Available at: [dezeenhttps://www.dezeen.com/2015/08/03/justin-mcguirk-appointed-chief-curator-london-design-museum](https://www.dezeen.com/2015/08/03/justin-mcguirk-appointed-chief-curator-london-design-museum). (Accessed 4.03.18).

<sup>382</sup> Edwin Heathcote, 'What are design museums actually for?', *Financial Times*, 26 September 2014. Available at: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/what-are-design-museums-for/> (Accessed 15.10.17).



**Fig. 48:** *Fear and Love: Reactions to a Complex World* at the Design Museum, 2016. Curated by Justin McGuirk. Exhibition design: San Jacob Studio. Graphic design: OK-RM.

The museum's second exhibition in its new building, *California: Designing freedom* (24 May - 15 October 2017) explored how the term, 'designed in California', expresses a distinctive approach to design and life. While California's mid-century modernism is well documented, this was the first exhibition to examine the state's current global reach. Curated by the museum's Chief Curator, Justin McGuirk, the exhibition charted the journey from counterculture in the 1960s to Silicon Valley's tech culture. Its central idea was that California has always pioneered tools of personal liberation, from LSD to surfboards and iPhones. The ambitious survey brought together over two hundred objects, that included political posters, personal computers and self-driving cars. The exhibition looked beyond hardware to explore how user interface designers working in the region are shaping some of the most common daily experiences and expanding common perceptions of what design is.<sup>383</sup>

The first two exhibitions at the museum's new location in Kensington

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<sup>383</sup> Design Museum - Exhibitions. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/california-designing-freedom> (Accessed 15.10.17).

signalled an evolving curatorial strategy, that was moving away from the original focus of the museum on the mass manufactured object when it opened in 1989. In 2018 McGuirk revealed a new curatorial strategy for the Design Museum that was intended to underpin all of its activities.<sup>384</sup> Three programming strands would guide future curatorial programming at the museum. The intention was to offer a range of subjects to appeal to broad audiences that made the impact of design visible. The exhibitions and displays would interpret design as a process and as a way of thinking, rather than the finished object.

The first strand, *Design for an Expanded Audience*, is intended to appeal to a larger, broader audience and presents a blockbuster type of exhibition. Examples of this approach are *Ferrari: Under the Skin* (15 November 2017 - 15 April 2018); *Azzedine Alaïa: The Couturier* (10 May - 7 October 2018) and *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition* (planned for 26 April - 17 September 2019). The second strand, *Design in a Changing World*, offers subjects considered by the museum to be 'less popular' subjects but ones which are incredibly important reflecting design's response to wider political, social and cultural issues. Examples of this type of thematic exhibition would be the museum's annual *Beazley Designs of the Year*, *California: Designing Freedom* (24 May - 15 October 2017) and *Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008 - 18* (28 March - 12 August 2018). The third strand, *Design as Practice*, explores how designers work and think and invites designers into the museum "to think in public". Examples of this focus on contemporary practice in design include the museum's annual Designers in Residence programme and exhibitions *Breathing Colour by Hella Jongerius* (28 June - 24 September 2017) and *David Adjaye: Making Memory* (planned for 2 February to 5 May 2019).

## Conclusion

Since opening in 1989, the Design Museum has provided a platform for the many views of what design can be, through its exhibitions programme,

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<sup>384</sup> Justin McGuirk, Presentation to MA Curating Contemporary Design students at the Design Museum, 26 September 2018.

learning and public programme, its design awards and residencies. An analysis of its programming activity since 1989 has revealed that the museum has been interested in fashion, architecture, product design, graphic design, transport and technology, in socially vital projects and speculative research and in designers who pose questions with their work as well as those who try to answer them. It also reflects the museum's dominant focus on industrial design and western male designers which, in 2004, resulted in very public tensions between the Director and the trustees. The introduction of exhibitions addressing the areas of fashion and craft and its changing missions statements suggest a continual attempt by the museum to capture and interpret a rapidly changing landscape for design.

The Design Museum, and the Boilerhouse Project before it, used the medium of the exhibition as the primary vehicle with which to communicate its definition of design. The exhibition has the potential to offer both a narrative and an experiential approach and, as a discussion of selected past exhibitions has shown, the museum has employed both approaches. New curatorial strategies have, in turn, created new and expanded roles for the curator.

The museum's Director, Deyan Sudjic, considers that the role of the curator is to mediate and to explain, to tell an effective and engaging story in as few words as possible, and to bring together images and objects that can evoke, or provoke. In his view, the curator's task is to select and be selective. To do so, the curator needs to understand the gap between curatorial intentions and the impact that a display has on an audience.<sup>385</sup> Sudjic has used the analogy of the theatre, suggesting that running a museum is like running a theatre. In both, there is a visible response to the programme from visitors. If visitors like what the museum is doing they will spend time there, if they don't, they won't come. But for Sudjic there is something about an exhibition that, when it works, will persuade many

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<sup>385</sup> Penny Sparke & Deyan Sudjic, *Representing Architecture: New discussions - ideologies, techniques, curation*, London: Design Museum, 2008: 21.

more people to pay for the experience that would invest the same amount in a book or magazine:-

“...an engaging physical exhibition...does indeed offer a richer, more immersive experience that speaks to more people than any depiction in a book or magazine. In the same way that live performances continue to flourish even as sales of recorded music have been decimated, so the primary shared physical experience that an exhibition offers has a future.”<sup>386</sup>

Significantly Sudjic uses the words ‘immersive’ and ‘experience’ which clearly reflect a more general shift in museums, discussed in Chapter 2 (2.7), represented by a move away from object-focused displays in favour of a more experiential exhibition environment.

Writing in 2016, the museum’s Chief Curator, Justin McGuirk, stated:-

“I want to get away from the idea of a design museum being a place where you put objects on plinths. I want a more experiential format that allows you to think about issues, ideas and experiences... Design used to be for the user but now the user is increasingly one of the determinants of the outcome.”<sup>387</sup>

The proposition that exhibitions have the potential to educate, entertain, engage and provoke is an idea to be explored in the following chapter. Chapter 4 examines the practice of curating design through a single case study, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, an exhibition I curated at the Design Museum in 2013. I use my first-hand experience of curating the exhibition to discuss the processes, theories and methods behind it. I also want to show how it reflects and builds on the more recent developments in curating practice discussed in previous chapters, and how it might signpost future directions for curatorial practice in the field of contemporary design.

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<sup>386</sup> Deyan Sudjic, *B is for Bauhaus*, London: Penguin Books, 2014: 60.

<sup>387</sup> Richard Martin, ‘What are design museums for?’, *Apollo*, 26 September 2016. Available at: <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/what-are-design-museums-for/> (Accessed 10.03.18).

## CHAPTER 4:

### The Reflective Practitioner: *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* Design Museum, London, 15 November 2013-22 June 2014

**“To understand what the curator does is to understand what you are looking at in an exhibition.”**

Seth Siegelaub (2012)<sup>388</sup>

#### 4.1 Demystification and Professional Practice

In 1990, art critic Seth Siegelaub identified the concept of “demystification” as one of the most pertinent issues in curatorial discourse. The term described a process in which curators and artists attempted to understand and be conscious of their actions; to make clear what they and others were doing. He suggested an urgent need to expose the processes behind the art exhibition. In his view, making curatorial procedures more visible, and exposing the various decision-making processes through which exhibitions are produced, demonstrates what is disseminated as art and how information about art is mediated.<sup>389</sup> Writing in 2012, curator and writer Joshua Decter revealed a similar issue when he commented:-

“Cultural institutions and museums would prefer that ‘invisible’ forces of contemporary art exhibitions remain precisely that - invisible. So much of what happens inside...cultural institutions remains hidden from the public’s view, and, often, even from the eyes of the specialised art crowd.”<sup>390</sup>

Terry Smith notes that it is rare for curators to reflect, in a sustained way, in print, on their professional practice.<sup>391</sup> For Smith, by revealing the ways in which the curator has chosen to initiate, organise, display and interpret material is to think about how art is framed, how it is spoken about and

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<sup>388</sup> Seth Siegelaub cited in Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts / London: MIT, 2012: 19.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.: 32.

<sup>390</sup> Joshua Decter cited in Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts / London: MIT, 2012: 32.

<sup>391</sup> Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2012: 179.

how it is expressed by those responsible for its conceptualisation and production. Documenting and critically reflecting on this process also contributes to an evolving history of curating.

The issues revealed by Siegelau, Decter and Smith are discussed in relation to art curating. They can also be applied to the practice of curating design which, as this thesis has sought to show, remains a largely unexplored area. This chapter sets out to “demystify” and expose the processes behind the design exhibition by critically reflecting on my approach to curating an exhibition at the Design Museum in 2013, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

I adopt a conceptual methodology of the “reflective practitioner”, an approach pioneered by social scientist, Donald A. Schön. This mode of investigation provokes a process of self-questioning into my practice as a curator and into the ways in which I curate design exhibitions.<sup>392</sup> As Schön argues, “the reflective practitioner” engages in reflective conversations with their situations by reflecting on their patterns of action, on the situations in which they are performing and on the know-how implicit in their performance. Schön argues that it is necessary to “demystify” professional knowledge, a view supported by Paul O’Neill some thirty years later when he notes that demystification is now widely accepted within curatorial discourse as a method of defining and representing a curatorial position.<sup>393</sup>

This chapter attempts to contextualise the ideas and processes that came together to form the final exhibition within the cultural and theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous chapters. I use my first-hand experience of curating the exhibition to discuss the processes, theories and methods behind it. I also want to show how it reflects and builds on the more recent developments in curating practice, discussed in previous

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<sup>392</sup> Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action*, United States of America: Basic Books Inc., 1983: 265.

<sup>393</sup> Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts / London: MIT, 2012: 34.



chapters, and how it might signpost future directions for curatorial practice in the field of contemporary design. I explore how a first curatorial concept is conceived, moves to a finished proposal and progresses to the final exhibition. I attempt to identify and articulate how contingent considerations such as venue, scale, duration, budget, audience and collaborative working factor into creating an exhibition. My investigation presents the processes, decisions, tensions and compromises that took place during the exhibition's development to show how solutions were reached and decisions made, and how they impacted on the exhibition in its final form. By reflecting upon my own practice, and making that practice explicitly visible, I shed light on the approaches, theories and methods of curating contemporary design. A critical self-reflection has helped me to understand my own curatorial practice, and to use the insights gleaned to help others understand what constitutes design curating, as I have engaged with it.

#### **4.2 The Case Study: *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith***

A number of considerations guided my choice of an exhibition as a case study for analysis. I have chosen to focus on the Design Museum exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* as it brings into debate a range of issues at play in its formation and reception. Firstly the exhibition needed to address a contemporary subject so that it would adequately reflect the shifts, debates and issues discussed in previous chapters. Secondly, it had to have available as complete a record as possible of the debates and the decisions surrounding its development.

Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, in their introduction to *Thinking About Exhibitions*, state that exhibitions are by definition selective and exclusive due to the biases of the organisers and the actual or perceived constraints of space, finance and availability of works.<sup>394</sup> The Design Museum exhibition reflects many of these issues and also highlights particular challenges for the curator.

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<sup>394</sup> Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996: 1.

Curating an exhibition on a high profile designer whose career in the fashion industry extends over forty years brings a number of challenges. The task is made more complicated by the sheer amount of material and design practice that extends over this period and which is available to the curator. Paul Smith is a global brand whose work is familiar to global audiences, through the Paul Smith collections, shops, publications and through the brand's active use of social media. The implications for the curator of collaborating with a long-standing and powerful fashion brand brings further complicated issues such as retaining curatorial autonomy. Finally there is the role of the monograph exhibition for a museum of contemporary design and how the Design Museum might bring a distinctive approach to the traditional model. It was important to consider how an exhibition on such a ubiquitous figure in design could present a new angle and a fresh perspective on the designer and his work.

Exhibitions focusing on a single artist or designer are perhaps the most straightforward but also potentially the most formulaic. The format for the exhibition is readily established through the biography, timeline and celebrity of the artist and there is usually a clear evolution in the work, which is often presented chronologically. Curator Robert Storr has noted how one-person shows tend to follow a biographical narrative line and urges that anything the exhibition-maker can do "to arrest the rush toward that denouement, to digress from the main events in order to concentrate on the overlooked aspects of the work's character is necessary."<sup>395</sup> An exhibition on Paul Smith raised a number of questions - Does a monograph need to be comprehensive? How much emphasis should there be on a designer's personal life or lifestyle? How much emphasis on the designer's practice and process? Is it necessary to give some context of the social, political and cultural landscape that the designer is operating in?

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<sup>395</sup> Robert Storr, 'Show and Tell' in Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Press, 2006: 26.

The exhibition presented a number of challenges but also opportunities to engage with existing audiences and also to potentially expand the museum's audience base. Following its opening on 15 November 2013, the exhibition received critical and popular acclaim prompting The Guardian to comment; "...the desirability and visual punch of his work, right up to the very present, makes his talent rare and this exhibition one I can't recommend highly enough."<sup>396</sup> Audience evaluation during, and following the exhibition supported the fact that the exhibition was hugely successful both in terms of visitor numbers and visitor satisfaction. It attracted record-breaking audiences for the museum, in excess of 100,000 visitors.<sup>397</sup> The accompanying book, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith: Fashion and Other Stories*, co-authored with Design Museum Director, Deyan Sudjic and published by Rizzoli Publications became the best-selling exhibition catalogue in the Design Museum shop.



**Fig. 52:** Front cover of exhibition catalogue, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith: Fashion and Other Stories*, published by Rizzoli publications, 2013.

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<sup>396</sup> Colin Chapman, 'What I learned from the Paul Smith exhibition', *The Guardian*, 20 November 2013. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/sharpened-lead/2013/nov/20/paul-smith-exhibition-design-museum> (Accessed 24.11.13).

<sup>397</sup> 'Christian Louboutin exhibition breaks Design Museum visitor records', Media release, 19 June 2012, the Design Museum archives, London.

The exhibition also proved to be a successful touring exhibition format. Prior to its opening at the Design Museum, the exhibition received strong interest from international museum venues and when it closed in June 2014, embarked on an international tour across Europe, Japan, Taiwan and China. At the time of writing, the exhibition is about to open at its eleventh tour venue, Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul.<sup>398</sup>

The exhibition is also significant because of its context at the Design Museum. The museum is not a specialist fashion museum nor one which has a dedicated fashion collection. As discussed in Chapter 3 (3.4), in spite of this non-specialism and a challenging relationship with fashion over the years, the museum has previously staged a number of very successful fashion exhibitions. with fashion becoming a regular strand in the Design Museum's exhibition programme. Largely monographic in focus, subjects have included the milliner Philip Treacy (5 July - 27 October 2002); shoe designer Manolo Blahnik (1 February - 11 May) 2003); fashion photographer Tim Walker (9 May - 7 September 2008); fashion designers Matthew Williamson (17 October 2007 - 17 January 2008) and Hussein Chalayan ( 22 January - 17 May 2009). In 2012 the exhibition on shoe designer Christian Louboutin (1 May - 9 July 2012) broke all attendance records for the museum.<sup>399</sup>

This programming taps into a rising interest more broadly in the fashion exhibition and a recognition by the Design Museum that fashion

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<sup>398</sup> Since 2015 the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* has toured to:-  
Mode Museum, Hasselt: 30 January - 7 June 2015 (40,000 visitors)  
The Lighthouse, Glasgow: 21 January - 27 March 2016  
The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto: 06 June - 18 July 2016 (72,689)  
Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo: 26 July - 24 August 2016 (83,735 over 4 weeks)  
Matsuzakaya Museum, Nagoya: 10 September - 16 October 2016 (33,398)  
Huashan 1914 Creative Park, Taipei: 17 June - 3 September 2017 (87,358)  
Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai: 10 October 2017 - 7 January 2018 (61,254)  
Today Art Museum, Beijing: 7 June - 7 October 2018: (50,000)  
CR Land Art Centre, Shenzhen: 7 December 2018 - 15 April 2019  
Dongdaemun Design Plaza, Seoul: June - September 2019  
Asia Culture Centre, Gwangju: September - November 2019  
Moscow, Russia: Dates to be announced.

<sup>399</sup> 'Dita's a dream for museum', *Evening Standard*, 15 June 2012.

exhibitions are popular and have the potential to reach a broad audience, often guaranteeing extensive media coverage and paying visitors through the door. Florence Walters writing in *Museums Journal* in March 2015 observed that museums were beginning to understand that exhibitions about fashion had the potential to be hugely popular and that they “look set to continue to be a big draw for visitors...helping to attract audiences that may not be traditional museum-goers.”<sup>400</sup>

In January 2013 the Design Museum announced the acquisition of its first fashion collection comprising over four hundred items donated by a museum trustee, Jill Ritblat.<sup>401</sup> Following the exhibition, *Hello My Name is Paul Smith*, the museum staged a major survey show, *Women Fashion Power* (29 October 2014 - 26 April 2015). The exhibition explored the ways in which women working in the realms of art and design, economics and politics, media, fashion and music use fashion as an important tool of self-expression and empowerment to build reputation and assert authority.<sup>402</sup> More recently, in 2018, the Design Museum opened an exhibition on the couturier, *Azzedine Alaïa* (10 May - 7 October 2018).<sup>403</sup> The exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, represents a continuing focus by the museum on the subject of fashion.

It was not the first time that I had been involved in an exhibition on the designer. I joined the Design Museum as a curator in 1998 when the exhibition, *Paul Smith True Brit*, marking twenty-five years of the Paul Smith brand was about to embark on an international tour. One of my first curatorial tasks was to oversee the tour of the exhibition. I travelled with the exhibition as it toured to venues in three cities in Japan; Mitsubishi

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<sup>400</sup> Florence Walters, ‘The Clothes Shows’, *Museums Journal*, March 2015: 24-29.

<sup>401</sup> Design Museum press release, 2013, Personal Archive.

<sup>402</sup> Design Museum - Exhibitions. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/women-fashion-power> (Accessed 8.09.18).

<sup>403</sup> Design Museum - Exhibitions. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/azzedine-alaa-the-couturier> (Accessed 16.09.18).

Museum of Art, Tokyo; Kobe Fashion Museum and IMS Hall, Fukuoka. My role was to manage the installation and to attend the opening of the exhibition at each venue.<sup>404</sup> The experience was a very positive one and invaluable, not only in terms of understanding the complexities of installing touring exhibitions, but also to have the opportunity to work closely with the Paul Smith team and to engage with an extensive range of exhibits.

It is unprecedented for the Design museum to revisit the subject of an exhibition and raises the question as to why the museum decided to stage a second exhibition on the designer. The longevity and global success of the Paul Smith brand prompted a proposal by the Director to stage an exhibition that would present a reflection on Smith's work and achievements over the period.

In 2012 the decision to stage an exhibition on the work of the designer, Paul Smith, some twenty years on from the first exhibition in 1995, was approved by the Design Museum Trustees. I was asked to curate the exhibition by the museum's Director, having been closely involved with the earlier exhibition at the museum. The exhibition would occupy the main first floor gallery (600 square metres) but could potentially extend into other spaces around the museum. It was expected that the exhibition would have broad audience appeal and would be targeted towards school children and young people. It was scheduled to open in the autumn slot of 2013 in order to capture the start of a new academic term for schools, colleges and universities. A project team for the exhibition was assembled. The team was composed of six staff members with the curator as project director. The different areas of specialism within the museum were represented by staff members representing Exhibitions, Learning, Communications, Development and, when appointed, an exhibition designer and a graphic designer. The team met on a bi-weekly basis up until the exhibition's opening on 15 November 2013.

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<sup>404</sup> The Design Museum's 1995 exhibition, *Paul Smith True Brit* toured to:-  
Mitsubishi Museum of Art, Tokyo: 18 September - 11 October 1998  
Kobe Fashion Museum, Kobe: 17 October - 27 December 1998  
IMS Hall, Fukuoka: 3 January - 24 January 1999

### **4.3 A Working Formula: The 6 Stages of Curating**

Over the course of my PhD research and reflection on my personal curating process, I have developed a framework which I refer to as “The 6 stages of curating”. The stages are a working formula with which to define the pivotal stages in the process of curating a design exhibition and identify the key constituents of the curating process. The 6 stages comprise Stage 1: Curatorial Research; Stage 2: Concept Development and Narrative Structure; Stage 3: Design Brief and Detailed Design Development; Stage 4: Content and Interpretation ; Stage 5: Production and Installation and Stage 6: Evaluation and Critical Reflection. The framework derives from many years experience of working up schedules and timelines for exhibitions, in which the curator breaks down the curatorial process into its key constitutive moments, working back from the opening date of an exhibition.

The exhibition schedule is a key project management tool to help to keep an exhibition on track and to assist and inform others working on the project, either as part of the internal project team (designers and contractors) or external stakeholders (sponsors, development and communications teams) to understand the key milestones in the curatorial process. In this chapter, I use the framework of 6 stages to define the key milestones in the development of the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, in order to unpack the process and to provide an understanding as to why the exhibition was conceived and developed in the way that it was. Each section begins with an exploration of a stage of the curating process presenting an account of its development along with the debates surrounding its development. These debates connect to wider issues in the field which aim to situate the practice in a larger historical and cultural tradition.

### **4.4 Stage 1: Curatorial Research**

August - October 2012

A critical reflection of the curating process behind *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, revealed that I instinctively chose to do something different from the

earlier exhibition staged by the Design Museum in 1995. *Paul Smith True Brit* was conceived as a retrospective exhibition examining the life and work of Smith, Britain's leading menswear designer, through a series of displays showing the importance of tailoring skills, fabric selection and attention to detail.<sup>405</sup> The opening section of the exhibition, entitled *Who is Paul Smith*, conveyed the early history of the designer and the company, but the exhibition principally focused on the design process behind the collections and the commercial aspects of the business. This observation was further reinforced by an email that was shared with me by the Director of the Design Museum, Deyan Sudjic. The email, written by Sudjic and dated 3 January 2012, carried the summary of an early conversation that took place at an informal meeting between Sudjic, Paul Smith and Jonathan Towle, the company's Director of Marketing, at which the idea of an exhibition was first mooted:-

"You and I talked about what this show could be, and I got the sense that a retrospective life of Smith that showed all the best collections, and put across the history of the company, most likely was not what was wanted, though we could still discuss it. We also thought that an update of the previous exhibition [*Paul Smith True Brit*] would be a bit of a missed opportunity and that it would be more interesting to try something entirely different...I think we need to do something more than just one aspect or dimension of Paul's work or if we are to satisfy the audience, I am not at all sure what the something more is..."<sup>406</sup>

The email communication revealed that initial discussions about the exhibition had taken place at a much earlier stage and derived from a close, personal relationship between Sudjic and Smith. In view of this friendship, my first consideration was how to maintain a curatorial autonomy and critical distance from my subject matter through the development process. My intended outcome was to create an exhibition that would engage existing audiences, but also reach out to new audiences who were less familiar with the designer and his work.

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<sup>405</sup> *Paul Smith True Brit*, Exhibition Catalogue, Design Museum, 1995.

<sup>406</sup> Email communication between Deyan Sudjic and Jonathan Towle, 3 January 2012, Exhibition files: *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum Archives, London.



I began work on the exhibition in August 2012. I decided that at the outset of the exhibition planning process, it was important to capture early conversations about the project in order to understand the scale of the project and the museum's ambitions for the exhibition, but also practical considerations such as timing and budget. It was suggested that the exhibition could be the final show at the museum's existing building at Shad Thames before its move to Kensington or an early one at the new museum. To realise the scale of show desired, a sponsor or sponsors would need to be found and sponsorship of £150,000 secured. Any new material commissioned for the exhibition would require additional support. There was an ambition for a major publication to accompany the exhibition. The exhibition should also tour to international museum venues, over two to three years, travelling to six or seven non-UK venues with Paul Smith Ltd providing advice and support on potential venues.<sup>407</sup>

### **Exhibition schedule and budget**

Following early discussions with the Director and the wider Design Museum team, I developed an exhibition timeline to define the key stages of the project. Over the course of my career, I have employed the exhibition schedule and budget as essential curatorial tools in the planning stages of an exhibition. They were first adopted following attendance at a project management training course during the 1990s while working as an Exhibition Assistant at the Barbican, London. The course introduced the principles and practice of project management. It emphasised the importance of planning to any project and the value of project management skills to keep a project on track, to help to identify what can go wrong and how to prevent risks occurring. An exhibition was defined as a project with a start and an end point, a series of objectives and agreed measurable of success. The training served to show the importance of planning work into stages. By employing a project management tool known as a "work breakdown structure", the exhibition could be divided into a series of stages or "work packages", running from the start of a

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<sup>407</sup> Donna Loveday, Exhibition planning meeting notes, August 2012, Personal Archive.

project, through project delivery, to the close of a project. The resulting schedule helped to communicate key tasks, timings and areas of work intensity.

Working backwards from the proposed opening date of the exhibition for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the purpose of the timeline was to identify tasks, estimate timescales for each task and understand any potential risks. At the same time, it was also important to have a clear breakdown of costs for the exhibition. Alongside the schedule, a budget was developed which broke down the total figure allocated to the exhibition into the various areas of expenditure. These areas ranged from research and design fees through to costs for the build and installation of the exhibition. At such an early point in the exhibition process, and with concept and content undefined, many costs were unknown. By referencing past exhibitions at the Design Museum of a similar scale and subject area, it was possible to estimate costs and produce a draft budget for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*. It was helpful to have a draft budget in place at the outset of the project, with the key areas of spend defined, which could be adjusted over time as more precise costs for design and production became known.

A PDF of the schedule for the exhibition can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P1).

### **Curatorial research and methodology**

The first stage of the curating process for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* was a three month period of intensive curatorial research. At the outset of the research period, it was critical to identify the research sources available to the curator, both primary and secondary, which would help to define a clear curatorial concept setting out the principal idea behind the exhibition, possible content and methods of delivery. Clarity of purpose was crucial to the exhibition's success. A clear articulation of its key messages and intended audience was necessary to drive the exhibition narrative, guide the selection of exhibits and inform a design brief for the

exhibition and graphic designer. I identified three key research sources; the Paul Smith company archive, publications and editorial about the designer and internal company documents. Before embarking on a series of research trips, I undertook a brief period of desk-based research to familiarise myself with the designer and the brand. As a methodology to guide my research, I developed four simple research questions; Who is Paul Smith; What was his route to fashion design?; What are the inspirations and influences that have informed his work over forty years? and What is his design process?

From this initial research, I devised an early framework which suggested three possible curatorial approaches to the exhibition. A first approach, *The Essence of Paul Smith*, could explore six to eight key aspects of Smith's approach, for example Wit, Englishness, Observation, Craftsmanship and Modernism with objects and images drawn from the Paul Smith archive. A second possible approach, *The World of Paul Smith*, could examine the key ideas, people and places that have inspired Smith over time, for example, a street market in India, the electronics supermarkets of Akihabara in Tokyo, Jonathan Ive's studio at Apple in Silicon Valley and Smith's own studio in Covent Garden, London, each of which could be reconstructed in the exhibition. A third and final approach, *A Year in the Life of Paul Smith*, could include sections on the design, making and selling of a Paul Smith collection.

This framework represented a starting point for the exhibition and from which a concept for the exhibition would later develop. As research progressed, I concentrated on uncovering as much historical and contemporary material about the designer, his design philosophy and design process as I could. As I collected together research material, I developed a visual archive of documents and images, stored as hard copy and electronically, that responded directly to my four research questions. Early on this process, I identified a pressing need to understand the

designer who was the subject of the exhibition and an interview was deemed to be the most effective way of achieving this. I wanted to be able to compare the secondary research material gleaned from books and editorial with a first-hand account from the designer. In August 2012 a first meeting took place with Paul Smith to discuss the Design Museum exhibition, at which he agreed to my request for an in-depth interview.<sup>408</sup>

### **Oral history: The in-depth interview**

Interviews have often been employed in creative practice as a research tool. The interview format facilitates the gathering of information about particular designers, exhibitions, publications and events generating first-hand responses to key issues, often in areas which have little critical material published. In a study published in 2013, *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, Linda Sandino explains how oral history has become an established, global and reflexive methodology. She notes that the term is wide-ranging and encompasses the in-depth interview, recorded memoir, life story, life narrative, taped memories, life review, self-report, personal narrative and oral biography. As Sandino states, the interview privileges first-hand narratives and experience and can offer insights or stories unavailable by other means.<sup>409</sup>

My preference for the interview format had developed over time. Past experience of curating the Design Museum exhibitions, *Hussein Chalayan: From fashion and back* (22 January - 17 May 2009) and *Christian Louboutin* (1 May - 9 July 2012) had clearly shown the value of interviewing the subject of an exhibition and how the content of interviews had directly informed the concept and content for each exhibition.

In 2011, attendance at an Open Day for researchers at the British Library had introduced me to the British Library's Oral History collections which

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<sup>408</sup> Donna Loveday, Exhibition meeting planning notes, August 2012, Personal Archive.

<sup>409</sup> Linda Sandino, 'Oral History in and about Art, Craft and Design' in Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington (eds.), *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013: 1.

include recordings of the cultural and political figures who have shaped the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each collection archived at the British Library comprises recorded in-depth interviews together with content summaries and transcripts. Each individual life story interview is several hours long, covering family background, childhood, education, work, leisure and later life. During the session, I listened to one of the earliest known recordings in the collections, Florence Nightingale, and reflected on what a privilege it was to be able to hear the voice of one of the twentieth century's most influential social reformers. The oral history collections at the British Library confirmed for me the value of the interview as a research tool. For the exhibition, it offered a means of engaging directly with the designer and securing a first-hand narrative, capable of revealing insights not available by other means.

A further influence was the work of curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. From the very beginning of his career, Obrist has undertaken an ongoing, expansive project to interview artists and creatives. The collection of interviews, known as *The Interview Project*, consists of over 2,000 hours of interviews representing the cultural figures that have defined modern life. When asked how he approached his conversations with artists, Obrist responded:-

“For me, it’s never predictable how a conversation will go. In order to prepare for a conversation, I read a lot, and I start with a single question. There are a few questions that I always return to when I have a conversation with an artist. The first is ‘How did it all begin?’ It is fascinating to learn what brings an artist to make art. Similarly, I ask ‘What was the beginning of the group?’ ‘Who brought them together and how did they meet?’ We start at the beginning.”<sup>410</sup>

Obrist’s perspectives on the interview process influenced my approach to the construction of a set of interview questions for Paul Smith. I spent considerable time deliberating over the questions that I wanted to ask, cognisant of the fact that the time allotted for the interview would be not be as long as I would like. I organised my questions into a series of strands.

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<sup>410</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, Zurich: JRP / Ringier, 2008 and *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

The first strand, *Where the Story Started*, consisted of questions relating to the designer's early life and career. The second strand, *The Story so Far*, examined the company's global success. A final strand of questioning, *Reflection and Inspiration*, asked the designer to reflect on the sources of his ideas and also on his ambitions for the Design Museum exhibition; what he wanted it to communicate and how he wanted it to inspire the visitor.

Following the interview with Smith, I employed the interview method again. I arranged to interview key members of the Paul Smith team, with the aim of understanding how different departments within the company operated but also to gain individual perspectives on working with the designer. I identified a first group of individuals occupying senior positions within the organisation and requested face-to-face interviews. The interviews took place at the Paul Smith office in Kean Street, London over a six week period in 2012. Interviews took place with Simon Holmes (Senior Designer Mainline); Nick Chandor (Head of Interiors); Susan Dickson (Senior Designer, Development); Mary-Ann Dunkley (Textile Design Manager); Lance Martins (Display Manager); Alan Aboud (Art director and founder of creative agency Aboud Creative); Sophie Boilley (Head of International Press).<sup>411</sup> I also spoke on the telephone with a former Head of Design at Paul Smith who, before leaving London to take up a new role in New York, had worked for the company for twenty-five years. Through the interviewing process, it became clear that many of the people that I interviewed had worked for the company for an unusually long period of time. Their memories and reflections were invaluable and inevitably posed the question; what was it that inspired such a longstanding commitment and loyalty to the brand? At the end of the interviewing process, I transcribed the material and highlighted potential areas of focus for the exhibition.

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<sup>411</sup> Donna Loveday, Exhibition Planning Notes, August 2012, Personal Archive.



**Fig. 49:** Paul Smith photographed in his office, Kean Street, London, 2017.

The location for the interview with Smith proved to be especially significant. The interview took place in Smith's office located on the top floor of the Paul Smith company offices in Kean Street, London. Smith and I were seated at a large meeting table in the centre of the office which was surrounded by a myriad of objects and ephemera. Shelves, walls and surfaces were covered with piles of books, CD's, bicycles, cycling jerseys, vintage cameras, rabbits, toy robots, photographs, letters. As Smith informed me, this material had accumulated over time and had derived from a number of sources, either brought back by the designer from his travels, or sent to him by people unknown to him but who followed his work.

As the interview progressed, Smith would disappear into a corner of the office and re-emerge with an object. It could be a cycling jersey worn by the championship-winning cyclist Eddie Merckx or a book on the work of architect Luis Barragan open at a page featuring a favourite building. In so doing, it became clear that the designer was attempting to reveal the extent of his personal collection and at the same time, his many interests and passions. During the interview Smith referred to the office as "his brain". Smith's actions during the interview indicated to me that the space in which I was seated was an important source of inspiration and ideas to

the designer. It also revealed that from all the 'things' accumulated in his office, often one idea would form and become the inspiration for a new collection or for the design of a new shop. As Smith revealed, the pink of a Luis Barragan building inspired the colour chosen for the exterior of the Paul Smith shop on Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles.

Oral historians, like Linda Sandino, have commented on the significance of place for shaping an interview.<sup>412</sup> My approach was also influenced by the field of autoethnography, a form of qualitative research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing. According to Garance Maréchal, autoethnography can also be associated with narrative inquiry and autobiography in that it foregrounds experience and story as a meaning-making enterprise. He argues that "narrative inquiry can provoke identification, feelings, emotions and dialogue."<sup>413</sup> Autoethnographer, Carolyn Ellis defines it as "research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political."<sup>414</sup> As Andrew Herrmann has written, "our identities and identifications with popular culture artefacts assist in our creation of self."<sup>415</sup> The context for the research interview would have a significant impact on the exhibition as a place that had helped the designer to create a sense of self. The observation triggered a key narrative in the curatorial concept and suggested an area in the exhibition that presented the designer's studio as an important source of ideas for the designer.

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<sup>412</sup> Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington (eds.) *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

<sup>413</sup> G. Maréchal, 'Autoethnography' in A. J. Mills, G. Durepos and E. Wiebe (eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research*, Vol. 2, CA: Sage Publications, 2010: 43-45.

<sup>414</sup> Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*, Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004: xix.

<sup>415</sup> A.F. Herman and K. Di Fate (eds.), 'The new ethnography': Goodall, Trujillo, and the necessity of storytelling', *Storytelling Self Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies*, 10, 2014: 7.





**Fig. 50:** 1. Paul Smith photographed in his office, 2012; 2. Paul Smith's office, Paul Smith Ltd, Kean Street, London, 2012.

### **The archive**

From September 2012, a series of research visits were organised to the Paul Smith head office located in Smith's home city of Nottingham. This was also the location of the company archive which comprised historical collections and company documentation. It also provided an opportunity to visit the distribution warehouse in order to understand the scale of the company's global operation which would influence the exhibition concept. As the archive had only recently been established in its current form, not all material was documented. This presented a challenge, but also an opportunity to uncover new material, not previously displayed or published. On arrival, I was ushered into a small area at the entrance to the archive that had been actively curated by the Paul Smith staff.

Conversations with staff confirmed that the objects had been selected because they were considered to be either interesting, quirky or provoked amusement. These discussions were helpful to understand what material the staff had deemed worthy of display and for what reasons. It helped to foster an understanding of the type of material that visitors to the exhibition might find interesting and helped to guide my own selection of exhibits for

the exhibition.



**Fig. 51:** A corner of the Paul Smith Ltd Company Archive, Nottingham curated by Paul Smith staff.

Regular meetings at the Paul Smith office in Kean Street, London provided opportunities to familiarise myself with working spaces within the building. In addition to Smith's office, other areas of the building proved to be of particular interest. The ground floor reception area, the walls of stairwells through the building, even the interior of the passenger lift, were completely covered with framed artworks, photographs and ephemera drawn from Smith's personal collection. The material ranged from photographs and artworks by high profile artists such as Peter Blake, R.B. Kitaj, David Hockney, Andy Warhol and Banksy through to drawings sent to the designer by students and children. I began to view the spaces around the building as an extension of Smith's office and the company archive. I used the time I spent in the building for meetings productively to identify and photograph potential objects for the exhibition.

While waiting in the reception area to be collected for project team meetings, I would observe visitor's reactions as they walked into the space, their attention diverted by the sheer volume of images and unusual ephemera that greeted them. The importance of being in the designer's

working environment during the research process was helpful in gaining an understanding of the environment that he had created, and was used to inform my curation of the exhibition. My observations would trigger a key narrative within the exhibition; that of the designer as collector and the creation of an art wall drawing on Smith's extensive art collection. The idea would further develop to form a significant space within the exhibition which became known as 'the bit in the middle' and which would provide a key orientation point for visitors.



**Fig. 53:** Stairwell, Paul Smith Ltd office, Kean Street, London.

During the research process, I wanted to understand the history and development of the Paul Smith brand, but also how the company talked about itself and presented itself to a global audience. I examined a range of company documents that included annual reports, press releases, editorial and look books. A bound corporate document entitled *Paul Smith: Tone of Voice* was sent to me by the Head of Communications at Paul Smith. I was very familiar with such documents. A challenge of working with brands can often be a strong desire by the communications team to control the messaging about the brand within an exhibition. I had intended

to read the document and then consign it to a file but an initial cynicism gave rise to interest. The document was notable in terms of the tone it adopted and the relaxed and informal way in which it spoke about the company and its customers:-

“The tone of voice for Paul Smith is much like Paul, the man - confident, British, approachable, polite, friendly, respectful, with a good sense of humour. Intelligent but never patronising, informed but not pretentious. No jargon and no fashion speak - straightforwardness is key, as is being confident enough not to bow to passing trends - a tastemaker not a follower...The way in which you communicate should always reflect the polite, respectful and friendly atmosphere of the company.”<sup>416</sup>

The document set out the company’s vision and guiding principles, twenty-seven keywords were listed as characterising the brand. I was cognisant of the fact that all the words used were very positive ones. They had also been carefully considered by Smith and his communications team to project a positive and professional image of the company. As the curator, it was important to retain a critical distance from my subject matter but I became interested in the potential of the exhibition to communicate a particular ‘tone of voice’ through the exhibition. With this approach in mind, I identified ten words from the document as possible drivers for the tone of the exhibition and ones which would connect with a Design Museum audience; *individual, relaxed, curious, creative, approachable, distinctive, friendly, polite, playful, humour.*

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<sup>416</sup> Paul Smith Ltd, *Tone of Voice* document, 2012, Paul Smith Ltd. Company Archive.



**Fig. 54:** Paul Smith Ltd *Tone of Voice* document, 2012, Paul Smith Ltd Company Archive.

Over time, artists and designers have used humour and wit to break down barriers between formality and familiarity, and to establish an immediate rapport with their viewers. American graphic designer and illustrator, Seymour Chwast commented that “humour is relief from the anxiety that the human condition generates”, suggesting that it satisfies an urgent need amongst artists and audiences alike to reflect upon the absurdity of daily existence.<sup>417</sup> Entire books have been written about design and humour showing how wit engages all the cognitive and physical senses of the viewer. Steven Heller in *The Art of Graphic Wit* suggests that humour can make design interesting for all parties involved in the creative process. In a discussion on the elevation of the pun from jest to graphic communication, Heller cites the words of designer Paul Rand who considered that visual puns were the key to his most successful designs

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<sup>417</sup> Steven Heller, ‘The Revolutionary Seymour’, Seymour Chwast Archive. Available at: <http://seymourchwastarchive.com/about/seymour/> (Accessed 17.09.18).

because “they amuse as they inform.”<sup>418</sup>

In an exhibition context humour, whether instinctive or deliberate, can be employed as an interpretive tool by the curator as a means of lifting an atmosphere, breaking down barriers or making intimidating topics more accessible. *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* had the potential to use humour as an all-important hook to attract attention and engage the visitor. As the curatorial concept for the exhibition developed, a narrative thread began to emerge around a strength of character and a personality which had actively shaped a company and its ethos.



**Fig. 55:** Paul Smith during a design meeting for the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, 2013.

Before design meetings for the exhibition, Smith would often walk down from his office to the reception area where he would greet me with a friendly “Hello”, offer to take my coat and ask if I wanted a coffee. During design discussions in his office, he would randomly bring out objects, at one meeting a mechanical hand, designed to “lift” the atmosphere of the

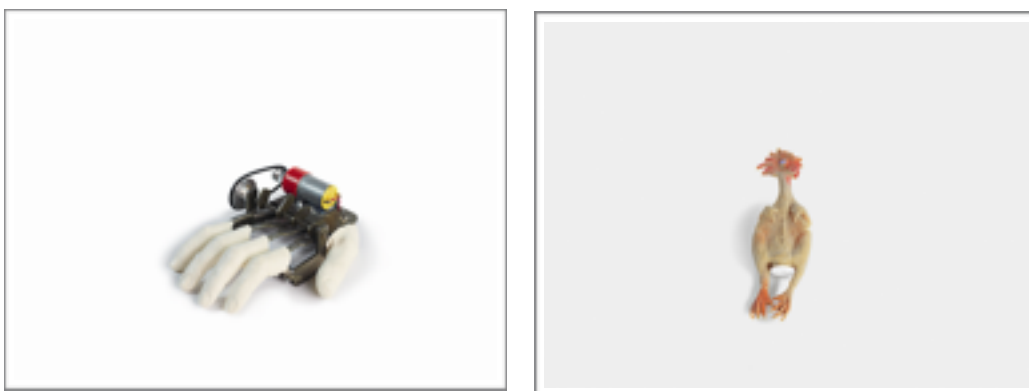
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<sup>418</sup> Steven Heller, *Design Humour: The Art of Graphic Wit*, New York: Milworth Press, 2002: 80.



meeting. From my interview with Smith, I learned that this was a trick employed by the designer during early visits to Japan in the 1980s. As he revealed in a later interview for *Esquire* magazine:-

“People always ask why I'm so popular in Japan and I always cite the rubber chicken. When I first went I was on my own and it was eighteen hours via Anchorage, Alaska, economy class. You'd go for two weeks and you'd get really tired and hardly anyone spoke English. So you'd be in a meeting and sometimes, if the timing was right, I'd just go into my bag and go, 'Bleurgh!' and pull out a rubber chicken. They'd go, 'Whooor!' Then of course, the next time they'd want to know where it was. It was one of those things where it just breaks the ice, makes people relax and makes people realise you've got a sense of humour. And they could never knock it because I was always so correct.”<sup>419</sup>



**Fig. 56:** The mechanical hand and rubber chicken from Paul Smith's office, Kean Street, London.

Desk-based research and interviews with company staff had revealed how much Smith was involved in the company designing the clothes, selecting the fabrics, approving the shop locations and overseeing every department within the business. In spite of its scale, the company had retained a personal touch that is difficult to maintain in larger companies. The company had been actively shaped by the energy and vision of an individual with the evident ability to capitalise on opportunities, a capacity for hard work, a determination to succeed all achieved with a warmth, humour and wit. This observation triggered a second narrative in the

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<sup>419</sup> Tim Lewis, 'How Paul Smith changed the way British men dress', *Esquire*, 10 October 2017.

exhibition, that of employing humour as an interpretation device through the entire exhibition. This was predominantly achieved through the graphic design approach.



**Fig. 57:** Stairwell leading up to the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

### **Trigger objects**

The mechanical hand and the rubber chicken brought out by Smith during business meetings in the 1980s were selected as potential objects for the exhibition, objects which I define as “trigger objects”. ‘Trigger object’ is a term I have used in my practice to define a hierarchy of objects. I use it to identify those objects that I consider to be significant in developing an exhibition narrative and which require a special, elevated place within the exhibition.

A single “trigger object” formed the starting point for the exhibition concept for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*. Searching through a box marked ‘Miscellaneous’ in the Paul Smith archive, I discovered a simple flyer dated 1970 showing Smith inside a stylish interior alongside ‘Homer’, his Afghan hound dog. The flyer announced Smith’s move from the Birdcage, a friend’s Nottingham boutique where he was working, to his first shop. The



flyer read as follows:-

“homer (& paul) have left the ‘birdcage’ and are now at, what they hope to be temporary premises, at 6 Byard lane, selling clothes for both sexes & some antique jewellery all past customers and friends are more than welcome business hours... Friday & Saturday only... 10 til 6.”<sup>420</sup>



**Fig. 58:** Promotional Flyer, 1970, Paul Smith Ltd Company Archive.

As Smith revealed to me during our initial interview, *Paul Smith Vetement Pour Homme* was a small, windowless room located in a narrow back street in Nottingham, Byard Lane, and it measured just three by three metres. It was only open two days a week as the rest of the time Smith was doing other work to finance the project. The rent was fifty pence per week and the shop would smell of Christian Dior Eau Sauvage which he sprayed to mask the odour of his Afghan Hound. The flyer was significant, not only for the humorous story connected to it, but also because it marked the very beginnings of the company. It would also mark the beginning of the exhibition narrative and influenced the decision to start the exhibition with a recreation of the first shop, built to scale in the gallery

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<sup>420</sup> Promotional flyer, 1970, Paul Smith Ltd Company Archive.

space. As discussed earlier, the importance of being in the working space of the designer, whether office, company HQ or first shop, had shown me how such spaces could help to foster an understanding of the designer. The experience of inhabiting such spaces influenced my decision to recreate the shop in the exhibition.



**Fig. 59:** The First Shop, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

A PDF of the curator's Research Notes and Archive Notes for the exhibition can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P2 and P3).

#### **4.5 Stage 2: Concept Development and Narrative Structure** November 2012 - January 2013

##### **Storytelling as an approach to exhibition-making**

Curators have increasingly sought to understand how visitors learn in exhibitions and applied this understanding to construct appropriate visitor experiences. As explored in Chapter 2 (2.5), the idea of a narrative approach to exhibitions, as a means of storytelling in space and as a way to enhance the ways in which visitors engage with spaces, concepts and objects, has been explored by a range of researchers and writers and has

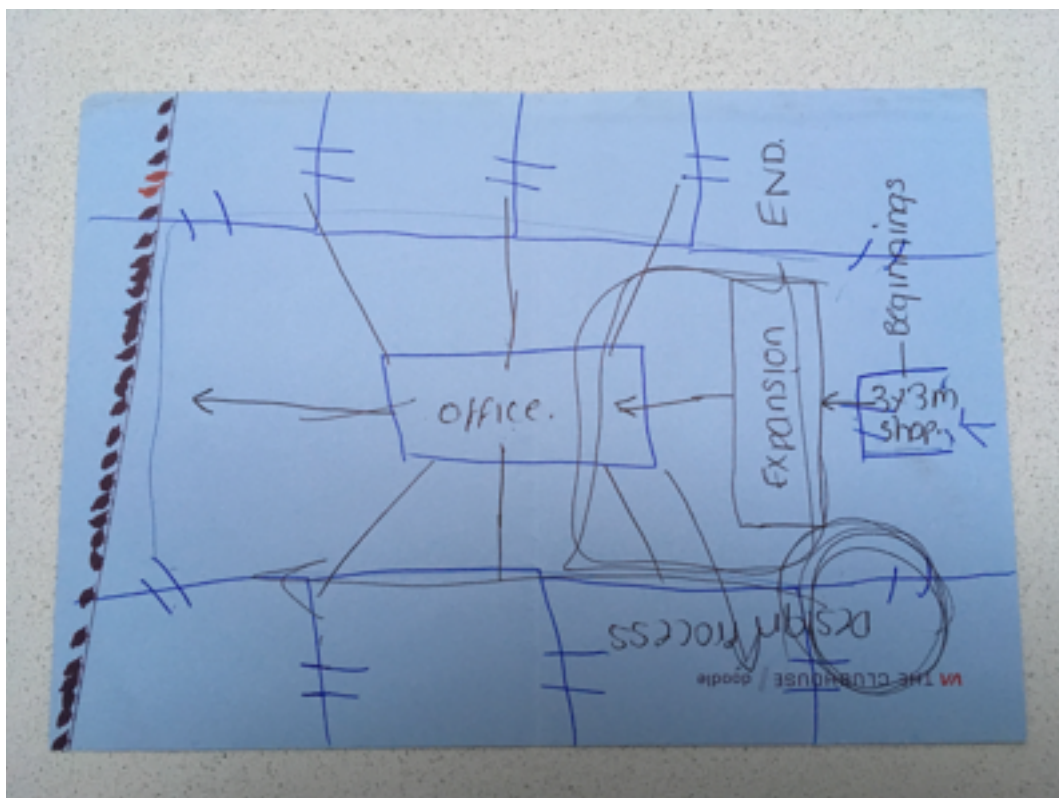
become a powerful and persistent idea for many curators working in museums. The narrative and experiential approach to curating exhibitions influenced my own practice as a curator, and informed my curation of the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

The narrative structure for the exhibition involved creating a journey through the world of Smith. The exhibition was intended to take visitors behind-the-scenes of the company and provide a rare insight into the designer's life, work and creative process. The overarching narrative was formed around the idea of creating a progressive journey through the exhibition space, through which the visitor would engage with different aspects of the Paul Smith story. Influenced by Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow', discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2), my intention was to create a powerful spatial experience that communicated a clear storyline and which allowed the visitor to move through the unfolding narrative breaking away, as and when they so wished, to explore other aspects of the exhibition in more depth. Along the journey, the level of their engagement progressed from passive viewer to active participant in the narrative with the exhibition conceived as an immersive environment.

The construction of such an exhibition narrative was a gradual process. From a detailed, critical analysis of primary and secondary research material and the transcripts from interviews undertaken with Smith and his team, two clear thematic threads for the exhibition emerged. The first was a story of modest beginnings. As Smith revealed in the interview, after leaving school at fifteen, he started work at a clothing warehouse in Nottingham. His real ambition was to become a professional racing cyclist but was forced to abandon the ambition following a serious road accident at age seventeen. After six months in hospital, during which time he met students at the city's art school, he managed a friend's boutique. In 1970 he took the decision to set up on his own and opened a small shop in Nottingham. He showed his first menswear collection in a hotel room in Paris under the Paul Smith label in 1976 where, according to Smith, only one buyer turned up at the end of the day but, most importantly, placed an

order. These modest beginnings established the Paul Smith brand, and would be important for visitors to the exhibition to understand when considering the present scale of the company and its global scale of operation.

The second narrative thread explored the ethos and working process of the designer who had shaped the company. My research has revealed how Smith's unique and intuitive take on design, together with an understanding of the important roles of designer and retailer, had laid the foundations for the company's lasting success. Smith was a designer whose ideas and inspirations came from wide-ranging sources and I saw the potential of the exhibition to create a strong focus on his design process. The narrative threads can be seen in my first, very crude first sketch on paper that attempted to illustrate a first narrative structure for the exhibition.



**Fig. 60:** First sketch of a narrative structure for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, Personal Archive.

## Beginning and endings

Narrative structures have a beginning and an end. Entrances into exhibitions are incredibly important, as transitional spaces allowing the visitor to pass from here to elsewhere. Jeffrey Horsley's PhD research has had particular resonance for my thinking behind the exhibition. Horsley, Course Director for MA Fashion Curation at London College of Fashion (LCF), identified three modes of presentation in exhibitions. The first is "Threshold" which he describes as the liminal areas between the worlds of outside and inside the exhibition space. The second is "Landscape" which Horsley describes as the framing of the artefacts through the creation of a distinctive environment or scenography to identify constructions and contextualise the objects on display. Horsley's third mode of presentation is "Object", how the displayed object relates to the material and immaterial content of exhibitions, and how that content is selected and manipulated by the curator to convey a particular narrative or meaning.<sup>421</sup> Horsley's idea of "threshold" had particular relevance for my approach, as I considered how the exhibition should begin and how it should mark a transitional moment of passing from here to elsewhere; the world of Paul Smith.

In theatrical scenographies, the entrances and exits to spaces become highly important. Doors are key scenic elements signalling beginnings and endings and, as such, they are used to frame narrative, suggest circulation and mark transition. The recreation of Smith's first shop in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* was incredibly significant marking the entrance into the exhibition and the beginning of the exhibition narrative. To use Horsley's interpretation, it was a "threshold" over which the visitor crossed to enter in to the world of Paul Smith.

The decision was made to "start small" with a recreation of Smith's first shop in Nottingham built to scale. Visitors would enter a three by three

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<sup>421</sup> Jeffrey Horsley, *Embedding the personal: the construction of a fashion autobiography as a museum exhibition, informed by innovative practice at ModeMuseum, Antwerp*, PhD thesis, University of the Arts London, 2012: 163 - 245.

metre plywood box which they would be forced to move through before entering into a larger space. Discussions at design meetings focused on how faithful this recreation should be. As there were limited photographic images of the shop's interior, it was decided not to attempt to create an exact replica of the shop but to present an empty, four-sided box built to the same scale as the first shop. Located at the entrance to the exhibition, visitors would be forced to walk through the space to experience the scale of the first shop and to understand how the company had started from such modest beginnings. The interior of the shop was empty except for a cabinet and a large black and white image of Smith taken inside the shop in 1970 uncovered during archive research. A small display case presented a range of objects from the period including advertising material, notebooks, business cards and the 1970 flyer which had inspired the exhibition concept.

The decision to paint the exterior of the shop pink was inspired by the colour of the exterior of the Paul Smith shop in Los Angeles. Smith's love of colour in his collections was well documented. The colour of the Paul Smith shop in LA had been inspired by the colours in the architecture of the Mexican architect, Luis Barragan (1902-1998). Smith told me that he had decided on the colour pink to ensure that the shop stood out from its competitors along the busy highway of Melrose Avenue. In the same way, selecting this colour for the first shop in the exhibition would ensure that the shop stood out to visitors as they progressed up the stairwell towards the exhibition space. The colour would also later be chosen as the primary colour for the exhibition's graphic identity which carried through to all the graphic elements in the exhibition as well as the cover of the book that accompanied the exhibition.

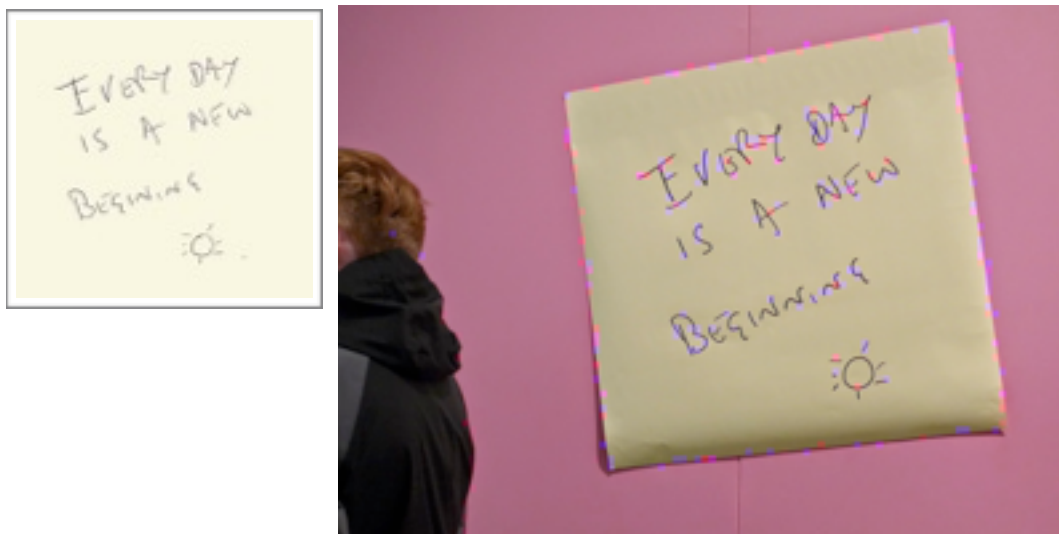


**Fig. 61:** References for The First Shop in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*: 1. Casa Luis Barragán, built 1948; 2. Paul Smith shop on Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles, opened 2005.

Exits from exhibitions are as equally important as entrances, as Robert Storr's comments on creating successful one-person shows reveal:-

“Correspondingly, the viewer should exit exhibitions energised rather than exhausted, and convinced that there is more to be seen, and other ways of seeing it.”<sup>422</sup>

The decision to include a giant post-it note at the end of the exhibition was inspired by discovering a collection of post-it notes in Smith's office during the research stages of the exhibition. Smith's love of witty puns and soundbites is well documented and he would frequently use post-its to record ideas or visitor comments. The final message, 'Every day is a new beginning' was designed to ensure that the exhibition did not simply peter out towards the end. The original post-it carried an incorrect spelling of the word, Beginning, which generated much debate at design meetings as to whether this note, complete with typo, should be included in the exhibition. It was finally decided to ask Smith to write a new note for the exhibition with the correct spelling. The purpose of the post-it was to ensure that the visitor left on a note of optimism, having engaged with examples of the designer's wit and humour through the exhibition, and hopefully inspired to engage further with the designer and his work.



<sup>422</sup> Robert Storr, 'Show and Tell', in Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Press, 2006: 27.

**Fig. 62:** ‘Every day is a new beginning’ at the exit of *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

### The visitor journey

The first sketch for the exhibition together with early hand-written notes capture the progression of my thinking and the gradual development of a narrative structure for the exhibition. Terry Smith has aptly described this process as “an attempt to gather all the elements under consideration into a pre-visualised exhibition or, more explicitly, into a projective imagining of the viewer’s journey through such an exhibition, or of the participant’s likely accumulative experience.”<sup>423</sup> These early “projective imaginings” for the exhibition are subject to change in response to factors such as time, space and budget and will inevitably be modified during the design stage.

The first iteration of the exhibition concept, which I referenced as *The Visitor Journey*, provided a draft framework for the exhibition and suggested possible themes. The themes formed distinct sections within the exhibition, and later developed into room titles as shown below:-

How the story started	Exhibition: The First Shop, The Hotel Bedroom,
The story so far	Exhibition: The Shops, Collaborations
The designer as collector	Exhibition: The Bit in the Middle, Paul’s Office
The making of...	Exhibition: The Design Studio
The image	Exhibition: Promotion
Paul Smith’s world	Exhibition: Inside Paul’s Head
A year in the life	Exhibition: The Collections, The Fashion Show
Inspirational thoughts	Exhibition: Exit - Goodbye.

The establishment of the concept document marks a moment of transition in the curating process. The curator approaches the end of the first stages of the process, Curatorial Research which informs Concept Development and Narrative Structure and moves on to the the next stage of development, the design phase.

A PDF of the concept document, *The Visitor Journey*, can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P4).

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<sup>423</sup> Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2012: 36.



#### **4.6 Stage 3: Design Brief and Detailed Design Development**

January - August 2013

##### **The project team**

In January 2013 the first project team meeting for the exhibition took place at the Paul Smith offices in Kean Street, London. The project team would be involved in all discussions relating to the content, design and installation of the exhibition and responsible for driving the project forward. The core project team comprised the curator, project manager, exhibition designer and graphic designer for the Design Museum and six members of the team at Paul Smith representing communications, display and interiors. The project team for an exhibition is led by the curator who convenes the meeting, sets the agenda and steers each meeting to a successful conclusion. During the planning stages for the exhibition, the project team will contract and expand as necessary, when other more focused discussions need to take place around learning, sponsorship or communications.

Project team meetings for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* held with staff at the Design Museum would always include a member of the Learning team to discuss potential ideas for a learning and public programme to accompany the exhibition. This reflects a more general shift, discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2), when an increasing number of educators began to join exhibition development meetings. The meetings also included representatives from other departments at the museum and opened up to other areas of expertise such as Communications, Development and Retail.

I presented my concept for the exhibition at the first project team meeting with the Paul Smith team. A discussion followed in which particular comments served to reinforced my own ambitions for the exhibition. Sophie Boilley, Head of Communications at Paul Smith, stated that, as the exhibition would tour extensively, it needed to work worldwide, be informative but mainly modern, surprising and not predictable:-

“I think we need to surprise people and touch them emotionally at the same time - they have to laugh, they have to feel moved, they have to feel surprised, they have to have a real positive experience.”<sup>424</sup>

Boilley suggested a dark room where all the walls could be used to show a fast diorama of images that have inspired Smith, and at its centre, a glass box lit in a dramatic way showing a selection of clothes. This idea was discussed at a later design meeting and although not fully realised, its essence formed the basis for the section entitled, *Inside Paul's Head*. Lance Martins, Display Manager at Paul Smith, wanted the exhibition to provoke. He suggested editing and minimising the information on Smith that was readily available and creating a non-linear layout, using non-conventional materials. He also suggested taking over the entire museum and utilising areas of display not usually used for exhibitions. Alan Aboud, director of Aboud Creative, made the observation that Paul's life is one big collection, a collection of people, clothes, words, stories, anecdotes and events, and that the exhibition should reflect this in some way.

At the end of the meeting, I asked each member of the project team to reflect on the concept and the exhibition's key messages presented and to email to me comments in response to the concept document in advance of the next meeting. The comments that came back were interesting, not only in terms of supporting the existing concept, but also in generating a discussion around innovative ways to communicate the messages of the exhibition and to interpret the physical material selected for the exhibition. Over the next week, I analysed the comments received and produced a document that listed six key deliverables for the exhibition which I presented at the next project team meeting. Over time, I had developed this approach in order to ensure that the key deliverables for an exhibition were fully discussed and agreed in writing by all members of the project team. It was also a way of using the meeting time productively and ensuring that discussions progressed and moved more swiftly on to other areas.

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<sup>424</sup> Email communication from Sophie Boilley, Head of International Press, Paul Smith Ltd, January 2013, Personal Archive.

As a project team, we agreed a number of key objectives. The exhibition should appeal to the design community as much as to the general public; it should not 'spoon-feed' information, but make people think; it should surprise and inspire; it should challenge expectations and show a side of Smith that many have not have seen before; it should avoid too much history; it should show how Smith's brain works and what triggers certain things in it. The exhibition design was considered to be a crucially important element; visitors should be transported by the exhibition experience.

Typically, a first concept for an exhibition will undergo a number of refinements before agreement is reached on a final concept by the project team and the Design Museum. There are inevitably compromises to be made owing to space and budget constraints. Notable is the fact that, following the initial design and detailed design stages for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the original concept and narrative structure remained intact and did not radically change. This reinforces the importance of a period of detailed research at the beginning of the curating process in order to ensure that the designer and his work are accurately conveyed in the exhibition. It also suggests the importance of project team meetings to ensure clear communication and that everybody involved in the process contributes to concept discussions and a consensus of opinion.



**Fig. 63:** A project team meeting for *Hello My Name is Paul Smith*, Paul Smith offices, Kean Street, London.

### **First iteration of exhibition design**

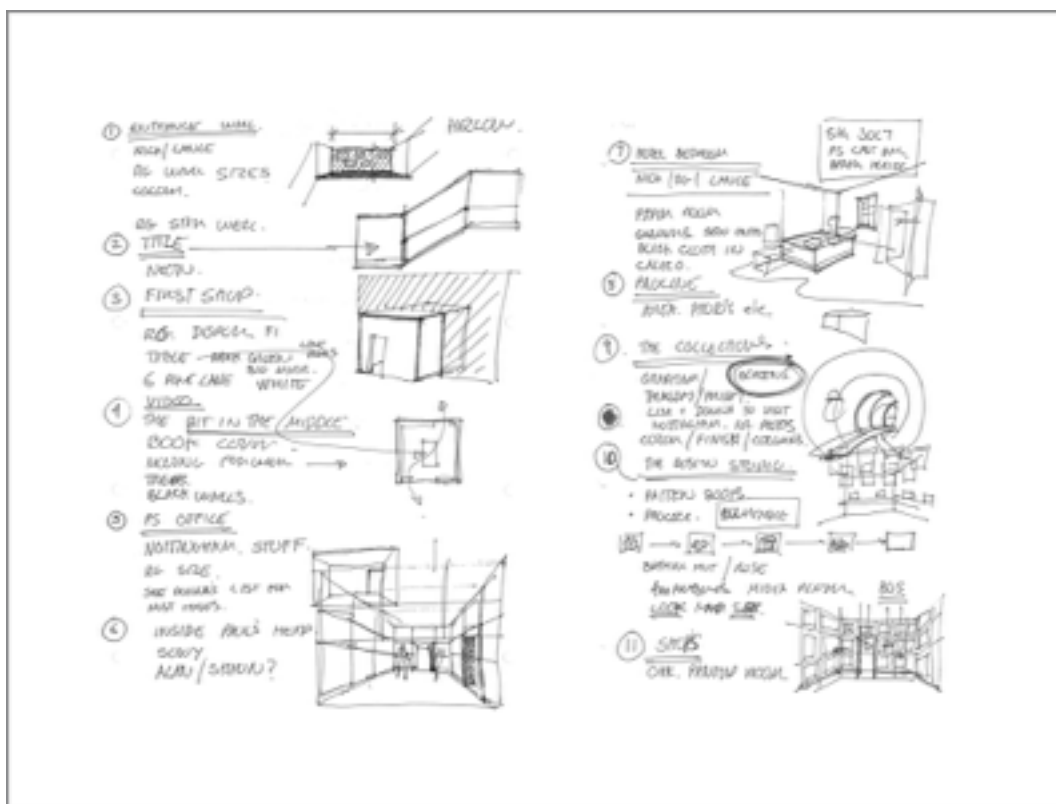
The design of the exhibition was a critical consideration and the exhibition and graphic designer were brought into the planning process as early as possible. The choice of who should design the exhibition was a relatively straightforward one. The Richard Greenwood Partnership (RGP) had designed the first Paul Smith exhibition for the Design Museum in 1995. Having worked with RGP on later exhibition projects, I was confident in the designer's ability to find creative display solutions especially when faced with the challenge of working with limited museum budgets. I put their name forward at a project team meeting which was unanimously supported. Aboud Creative, as the graphic agency for Paul Smith, were appointed as graphic designers for the exhibition and the accompanying book. The designers were issued with a design brief articulating the exhibition concept and suggested methods of delivery in advance of the first design meeting.<sup>425</sup>

At early project team meetings, the layout of the exhibition dominated discussions. The process of moving from a curatorial concept and draft narrative structure to a detailed exhibition design follows a series of intense discussions on the concept and design brief supported by a clarity of curatorial direction. Notes from the first design meeting show how important it was to have in place a clear concept agreed by all parties, and before the first design meeting, in order to allow the following design meetings to focus on translating the concept for the exhibition into a visually strong, coherent and engaging exhibition design. A series of design meetings followed to develop a layout for the exhibition. The discussions focused on key areas of the visitor journey and their progression through the space, from the moment of arrival to the point of departure.

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<sup>425</sup> Design Brief for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, January 2012, Personal Archive.

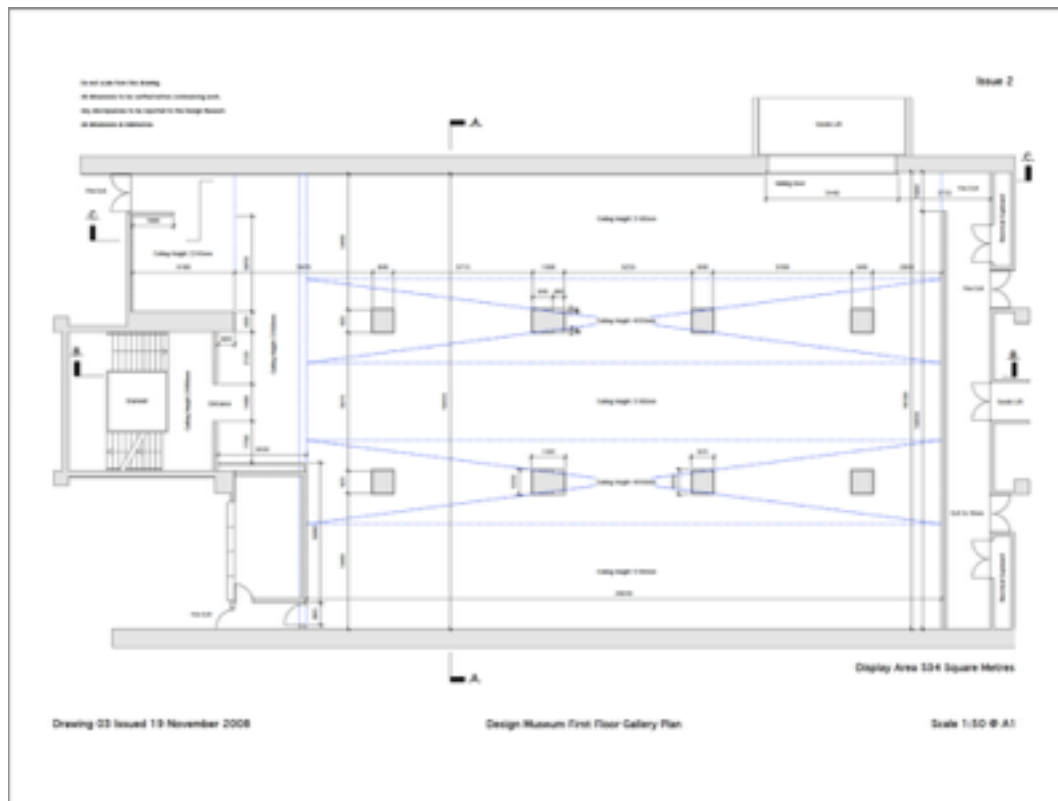
The first iteration of the exhibition design was a simple series of sketches. The sketches were executed by the exhibition designer, Richard Greenwood, during a meeting between us to discuss the budget for design and build which quickly developed into a more detailed discussion about the display of content. It shows a series of rooms following the narrative structure proposed in the document entitled, *The Visitor Journey*. The sketch shows the entrance wall, a recreation of the first shop, a central orientation area that became known as ‘The bit in the middle’, Smith’s office and an immersive video room that would become a digital installation called ‘Inside Paul’s Head.’



**Fig. 64:** First iteration of exhibition design for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* by exhibition designer, Richard Greenwood.

Following the budget meeting, the designer was issued with an empty floor plan of the Design Museum’s first floor gallery, the location for the exhibition. The floor plan provided total dimensions of the space (600 square metres) and the location of services and fire exits. The gallery offered an open ‘white box’ without any internal partitions, which allowed the designer to experiment with a number of display options. A potential constraint were eight columns, which punctuated the space, and which

needed to be either disguised or fully incorporated into the design for the exhibition.



**Fig. 65:** Floor plan of the Design Museum's first floor gallery, the location for the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

### Progression of exhibition design: The scale model

At an early stage in the design process, Greenwood created a scale model of the exhibition to allow a three-dimensional view of the layout. In architecture, scale models have always been an important part of the architectural process. In an opinion piece for *The Architects' Journal* in 2016, Gavin Henderson, Director of Stanton Williams, explained why the architectural practice make models to explore their designs:-

“Within our studio we work with the full range of technologies, but model making is fundamental to our culture and the development of our designs. Whereas our workshop facilities encourage precision and a pre-determined design which can be laser-cut and then assembled, we encourage the use of models which are loosely assembled - frequently simple assemblies of card held together with pins - and which are used to explore ideas and make design decisions: evolving working tools rather than models of a finished design.”<sup>426</sup>

I had commissioned models for previous exhibitions as a way to take an idea from two dimensions into a three-dimensional rendering of the exhibition. I anticipated that a model would prove to be especially helpful for Smith who had a preference to work from visual images rather than drawings generated and viewed on a computer screen. The model allowed the exhibition designer to communicate spatial explorations with the project team and the Design Museum. It also provided a shared focus for design discussions in a way that promoted interaction, the exchange of ideas and an engagement with the creative process of designing the exhibition. As Henderson comments, “Discussion around design models allows everyone to engage with the design of spaces and contribute to the creative process.”

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<sup>426</sup> Gavin Henderson, ‘Why Make Models?’, Opinion, *The Architects’ Journal*, 22 January 2016. Available at: <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/opinion/why-make-models/10001815.article> (Accessed 15.09.18).



**Fig. 66:** 1. Exhibition scale model for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*; 2. The project team referencing the scale model during a design meeting.

The exhibition model conceived by Greenwood became a familiar device at design meetings and, positioned at the centre of the meeting table, would help to generate discussion, clarify issues and help the project team to reach final design decisions.

### **The experiential in exhibitions**

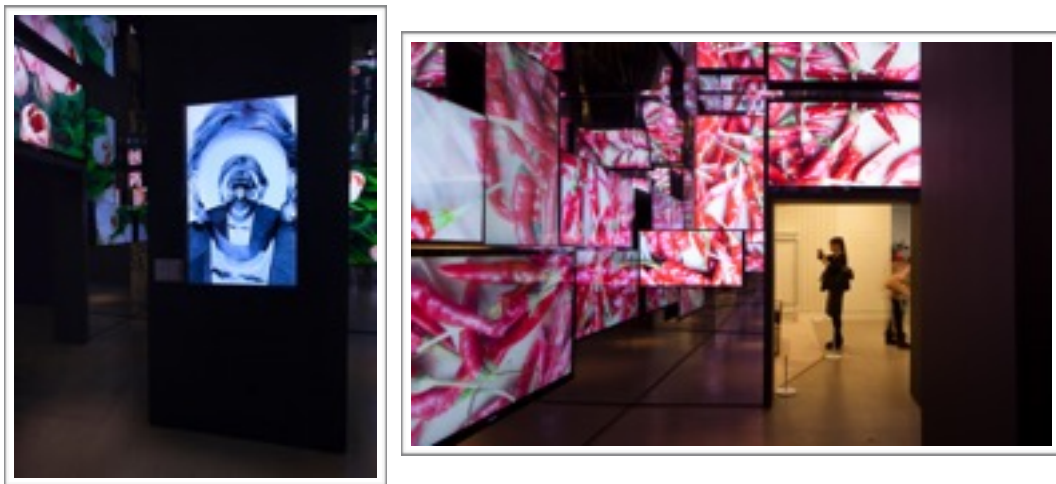
During design meetings, I would often steer the discussion to the different methods available to convey information and interpret content. The aim was to identify a number of techniques to ensure that objects were explained in an accessible and engaging way to reach the broadest possible audience. During the design process, there was a common desire amongst the project team to include an element of interactivity in the exhibition. The communications teams, in particular, expressed the view that there needed to be an area within the exhibition that invited visitor participation and that would offer opportunities for visitors to take photographs and share their experiences across social media platforms.

I explored a number of options for interactivity for the exhibition but all proved to be beyond the scope of the exhibition budget. A proposal received from the digital design collective, *Is this Good?*, suggested the



idea of a collaboration to create an immersive digital installation in the exhibition.<sup>427</sup> It would also present an opportunity to bring image and sound into the exhibition. Following a meeting with the designers, a brief was drawn up and a budget agreed for the commission. For some time I had considered how to bring the content of Smith's extensive photographic archive into the exhibition, which Smith would frequently reference for ideas.

The design proposal for the installation consisted of an enclosed room with banks of screens that projected a series of changing images selected from Smith's photographic archive. The visual display was synchronised with a commentary, recorded with Smith, about the subject of inspiration and its many sources for him as a designer. The intention behind the installation was to foster an active and creative engagement with the visitor. The works and personality of the artist could be more clearly communicated through the medium of image and sound. It was also notable how long-lasting a memory the projection created for visitors. The installation became a regularly photographed area of the exhibition with images often seen on Instagram and Twitter.



**Fig. 67:** The digital installation, *Inside Paul's Head*, in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

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<sup>427</sup> Is this Good?: Proposal for a digital installation inside *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, February 2012, Personal Archive.

## **Exhibiting a creative practitioner's studio in an exhibition**

Interviewing Smith in his office at Kean Street, London had fostered an ambition to recreate the working space of the designer in the exhibition. During our interview, Smith had indicated how the office was an important source of ideas and formed part of his working process, describing his office as a “madhouse” and “the equivalent of his brain”.<sup>428</sup> During the research stages for the exhibition, I was given a tour of the design studio at Kean Street and conversations with the in-house design team had inspired a number of ideas for the exhibition. The site visits posed a number of questions such as, alongside the finished product, how could the exhibition successfully convey the artistic personality and creative vision of the designer and the working process of the design team at Paul Smith? A recreation of Smith's office and the design studio would introduce visitors to the working spaces of the designer in order to show where ideas come from and how they are translated into new collections.

There is a long history of creating and displaying the creative spaces of artists and designers in exhibitions as a way to communicate process. In 2009 the V&A opened its refurbished ceramics galleries. Over three thousand examples from its collection were displayed in airy rooms with an abundance of natural light streaming through newly unblocked windows in the walls and ceilings. Reino Liefkes, Head of Ceramics and Glass at the V&A, explained that the museum had “the greatest and most comprehensive collection of ceramics in the world” but admitted that, for nearly 100 years, “they were relentlessly displayed” with little interpretation.<sup>429</sup> The V&A's new interpretive approach focused on process and the methods and techniques of ceramics production. In Gallery 143, a number of displays focus on particular making practices through history and around the world, and include a recreation of part of the London

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<sup>428</sup> Interview with Paul Smith, Paul Smith offices, Kean Street, London, August 2012, Personal Archive.

<sup>429</sup> Mark Brown, ‘V&A Museum to open revamped ceramics galleries’, *The Guardian*, 16 September 2009. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/sep/16/v-and-a-museum-ceramics> (Accessed 15.07.15).

workshop of Dame Lucie Rie, an Austrian potter who fled the Nazi regime in 1938, settling in London to become one of Britain's leading studio potters. The Gallery includes a functioning clay workshop, with a practising artist in residence. Master classes are given by leading potters, with demonstrations and practical sessions enabling visitors to make, decorate and fire their own ceramics.



**Fig. 68:** A recreation of Lucie Rie's studio displayed in the Ceramic Gallery at the V&A, London.

In 2016, elements of Robin Day's studio, on loan from the Robin and Lucienne Day Foundation, were installed in the Sackler Library at the newly opened Design Museum, Kensington. Items on display include his drawing table, drawing implements, set-squares and small models, together with the books and posters which surrounded Day as he worked. A number of books were on the subject of mountaineering and many images were of the Matterhorn, a mountain in the Alps, which Day has climbed during his career, revealing mountaineering as a particular interest for the designer. I had first seen the contents of the studio when I was invited by Paula Day in 2012 to visit her late father's studio in Chichester, following discussions about the possibility of acquiring some of the studio contents for the Design Museum collection. The studio was located in a shed at the bottom of the garden of the house where he lived until his death in 2010. Seeing the studio in its original context, where Day

worked for many years, helped me to understand the importance of such a space to the designer's thinking and working practice. It also made clear the challenges of recreating the studio in the new and very different context of the Design Museum.

Penny Sparke has addressed the issues for curators confronted with the challenge of reconstructing and curating an interior in a museum setting, or refurbishing and creating displays in the context of a house museum.<sup>430</sup>

She poses the questions, "how authentic can a retrospective reconstruction of interior spaces and their contents be? How does one capture a moment in time when interiors are in a perpetual state of reformation?" Trevor Keeble suggests that the most important decision that any curator must make is when to locate the space in its specific historical moment of truth and present the moment of a room's creation in order to best represent the characteristic qualities of that particular space.<sup>431</sup> A significant factor in the recreation of Smith's office was the fact that the designer was accessible and able to characterise and explain how the office was used.

Other sources of inspiration came from earlier meetings in the studio spaces of contemporary designers. I had always been struck by the way in which designers actively curated the spaces in which they worked in order to convey a number of messages about their practice. A good example of this is the studio of designer, Thomas Heatherwick. Heatherwick Studio is located on Gray's Inn Road, a busy area in King's Cross, in a red brick Edwardian building that the company shares with a two-star chain hotel. The studio, reached through a courtyard, first presents a visitor with a view of shelves holding dozens of design oddities, such as might be displayed in a Victorian museum or a Paul Smith menswear store. These include a Japanese mechanical lucky cat, spoons with unusually long handles, an engine part and perfume bottles designed by the studio for Christian Louboutin.

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<sup>430</sup> Penny Sparke, Brenda Martin, Trevor Keeble (eds.), *The Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 - 1950*, London: Routledge, 2006: xi.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.: 2.

A conversation with Evonne MacKenzie, Producer of Objects and Exhibitions at the studio, revealed that the work space is something which is given a lot of thought and attention, “in order to be somewhere that is a useful and inspiring resource for the designers that work here, to be a space that visually represents and encompasses some of the ideas of the studio and to create an impression and atmosphere for visiting clients and collaborators.”<sup>432</sup> The studio often collaborate with individuals who provide long-term loans for display in the studio such as David Usborne’s Objectivity and Tools collection; Charles Brooking’s Architecture collection and Stefany Tomlin’s Bead collection.



**Fig. 69:** The interior spaces of Heatherwick Studio, Gray’s Inn Road, London, 2018.

Meetings in Smith’s office space had similarly communicated the character and interests of the designer. Rather than an exact recreation, a careful selection of objects could communicate a wealth of information about the character and interests of Smith. Cycling jerseys would communicate the designer’s interest in cycling and his early ambition become a professional racing cyclist. A display of rabbits and robots would communicate the eclectic nature of the designer’s extensive collections and also help to communicate his humour. A plastic plate of spaghetti would reveal the inspirations behind the photographic prints, a technique which Smith introduced in the 1980s. The iMac positioned on the desk at one end of the office and given to him as a gift from Apple designer, Jonathan Ive as a regular visitor to the office, would convey the fact that the office was also a

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<sup>432</sup> Email communication with Evonne Mackenzie at Heatherwick Studio, 4 May 2018, Personal Archive.

source of inspiration, not only to Smith but to other designers.



**Fig. 70:** 'Paul's Office' in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

In deciding how to present the design studio at Paul Smith, I returned to an earlier exhibition that I had curated at the Design Museum in 2012, *Christian Louboutin*. During a series of meetings with the designer inside his Paris-based atelier, I was able to document the set-up of the space, its contents and how it was used by the designer and the design team. The atelier was dominated by a large central meeting table which comprised evidence of the designers working process such as tools, shoe lasts, material swatches, sketches and models of shoes in progress. These observations informed a decision to attempt to recreate the designer's working environment in the exhibition. Whilst the space was not an exact recreation of Louboutin's atelier, it provided a context in which the visitor was able to enter into the working environment of the designer and



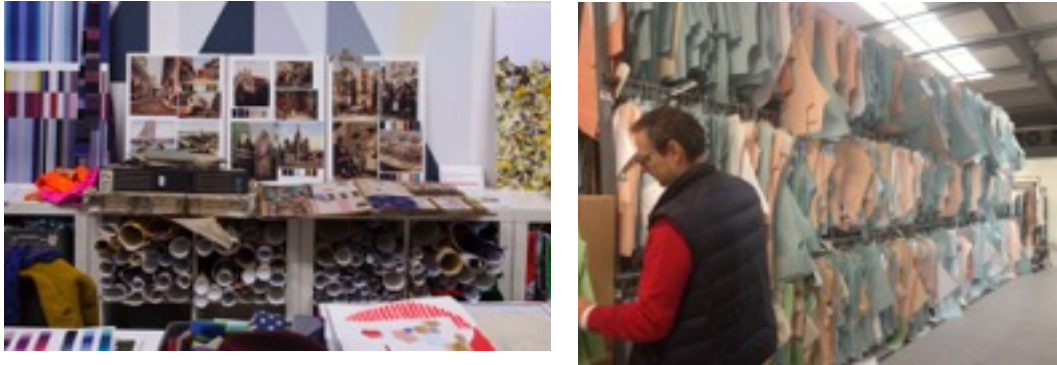
engage with the design process.



**Fig. 71:** A recreation of Louboutin's atelier, Paris in *Christian Louboutin*, the Design Museum, 2012.

The Louboutin atelier in the Design Museum exhibition in 2012 influenced my decision to adopt a similar strategy for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*. The Design Studio would present rich insights into the design process. A table, which ran the length of the space, carried tools, material swatches, rolls of fabric and other ephemera loaned by the design team at Paul Smith. Inspiration for the design and content of the space came from material discovered during the research phases of the exhibition. One of my research visits to the Paul Smith company archive in Nottingham had revealed an extensive collection of redundant patterns created for garments in previous Paul Smith collections, stored on floor to ceiling hanging rails. The patterns inspired the idea to create a ceiling for the design studio composed entirely of the paper patterns. I had also observed a collection of nineteenth century pattern books, stored on shelves inside the Paul Smith design studio in London, and which the designers would regularly use as reference. The pattern books informed a decision to explore the development of a print for a 2013 Paul Smith

mainline collection, adapted from an early pattern book. The design process was broken down into various stages, filmed and displayed on a series of iMac screens along the table accompanied by short, explanatory captions.



**Fig. 72:** Inspiration for ‘The Design Studio’ in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

### **Commissioning film to articulate design process**

There was a desire amongst the project team for “a big finale”, a space at the end of the exhibition that brought together all the ideas and processes revealed through the exhibition. For Smith, and as revealed during our interview, the fashion show was the end of the design process when a new collection was shown to press and to buyers for the first time.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.6), new technical and digital developments have provided the curator with a range of new formats and tools to deliver content. Since the end of the 1990s, a rapid boom in the creation of digital content through photography, videos and films, and the dissemination of content through websites, digital platforms, social media and digital publishing such as fashion blogs and online magazines have created new opportunities for museums and for curators.

This shift is most powerfully demonstrated by SHOWstudio, the award-winning fashion website founded and directed by Nick Knight, that has consistently pushed the boundaries of communicating fashion



online.<sup>433</sup> Established in November 2000, SHOWstudio's innovative and ground-breaking projects have defined the manner in which fashion is presented via the Internet. The site has pioneered fashion film and is now recognised as the leading force behind this new medium, offering a unique platform to nurture and encourage fashion to engage with moving image in the digital age. Working with the latest technology, SHOWstudio broadcasts live from catwalk shows and fashion shoots, allowing an international audience instant and unparalleled access to the previously closed world of high fashion. I had followed the work of SHOWstudio over time and their approach inspired a method of delivery in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

In order to communicate the behind-the-scenes process of a Paul Smith fashion show, a film was deemed to be the best means of delivery but it was clear that the exhibition budget would not meet the extensive costs of such a project. I approached Sony UK, who as corporate sponsors of the Design Museum, had supported the museum on previous projects. I met with the communications team at Sony and asked if they would be interested in collaborating with the Design Museum to create a film that explored behind-the-scenes at a Paul Smith fashion show. Sony responded enthusiastically to the idea, not least because they saw an opportunity to showcase a new technology. The company had recently introduced a new viewing format known as 4K which significantly improved the picture quality of screen images. The exhibition presented a promotional opportunity for Sony to shoot the film in the new format and, for the exhibition, it would provide a quality of viewing experience for the visitor.

At a design meeting, the proposal was discussed and a decision taken to film the upcoming Paul Smith Men's Spring Summer 2014 show due to take place in Paris in June 2013 which would make the film current. However, I alerted the project team to the fact that, if the exhibition was to

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<sup>433</sup> SHOWstudio website. Available at: <https://showstudio.com/about> (Accessed 13.06.18).

tour, the film would quickly become out of date and a new film would need to be commissioned which would have implications for the tour budget. I developed a brief for the film which outlined the key areas that needed to be filmed in order to communicate the process of designing and presenting a fashion show. I also arranged a time to interview Smith a few weeks before the show to record the commentary that would provide context at the beginning of the film.<sup>434</sup>



**Fig. 73:** The team at Sony preparing to film an interview with Paul Smith for ‘A day in the life of a fashion show’ at Kean Street, London, 2013.

A small team from Sony flew out to Paris a few days prior to the fashion show to set up for the shoot. The resulting film, *A day in the life of a fashion show*, explored the planning and staging of a Paul Smith fashion show. The seven minute film started with Smith seated in his office talking to camera about the importance of the fashion show to his design process and his approach to organising a show. The film then cuts to the empty venue, Smith arriving at the venue by bicycle, the arrival of the collections, rehearsals with the models, the set up of cameras by the press, arrival of the guests and the entire final show. An enclosed room with seating, essentially a black box, was designed for the end of the exhibition space in which to screen the film. The film room was deliberately positioned at the end of a tunnel space that presented The Collections. Visitors progressed through the tunnel and entered the film room to reinforce the fact that they were nearing the end of a journey through Smith’s design process, which

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<sup>434</sup> Film Brief for *Hello My Name is Paul Smith*, June 2013, Personal Archive.

culminated in the fashion show.



**Fig. 74:** ‘A day in the life of a fashion show’ in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

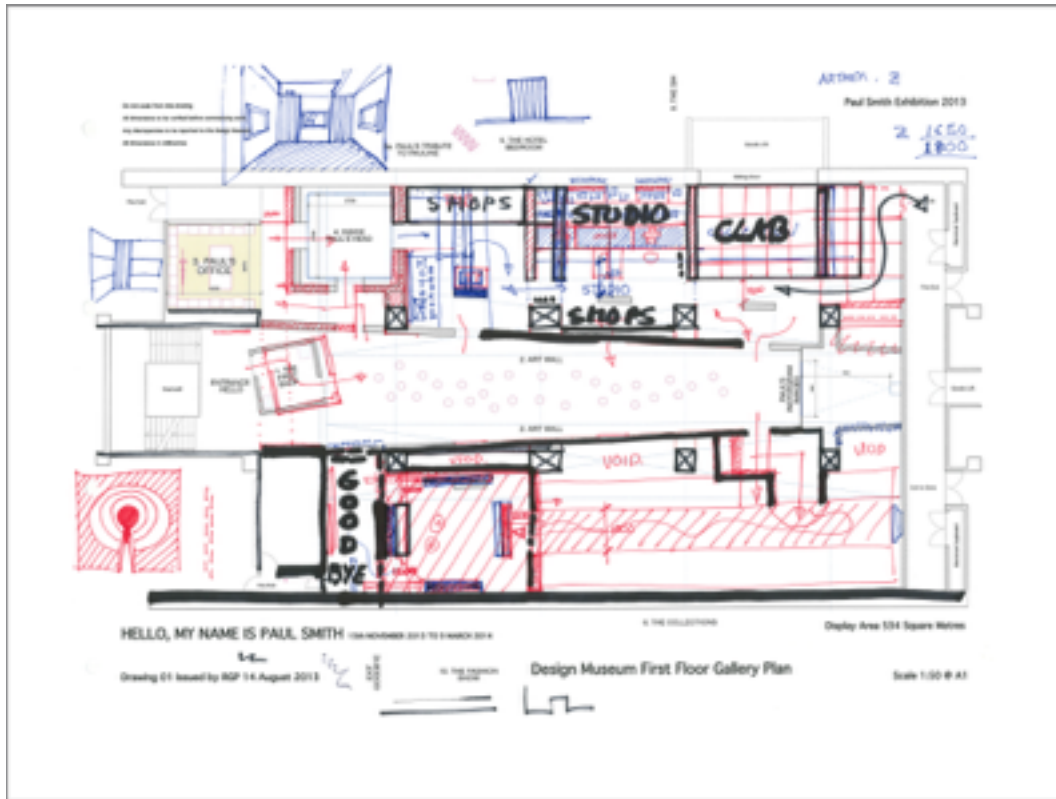
The film, *A day in the life of a fashion show*, can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P9).

### **Final iteration of exhibition design**

The first formal design for the exhibition (issued 14 August 2013) represents the outcome of detailed design discussions at a series of design meetings. Following a design meeting, the exhibition designer made the necessary amendments to the exhibition design and circulated a revised plan to the curator for review, and before circulating to the entire project team. For clarity and ease of reference, the plans were always numbered and dated by the designer and filed electronically by the curator, in order of the date of issue.

The first iteration of the exhibition design shows visible pen markings made by the designer during the progress of the meeting as discussions ensued about the most logical sequencing of rooms. At this point, the sections presenting the shops and the collections are shown along the first aisle of the exhibition. An area at the end of the central corridor is planned

to show a selection of Smith's Instagram images, an idea that was later abandoned when discussions moved on to a digital installation that would show a selection of images from Smith's extensive photographic archive.



**Fig. 75:** Exhibition design for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, Issued by RGP: 14 August 2013.

The next stage of the exhibition design (issued 12 September 2013) is considerably more developed with the final locations of rooms decided. The positioning of screens and display furniture is also indicated within each room. The layout for the film room at the end of the exhibition is detailed as conversations with Sony UK at this point, who were creating

IN USE FOR THE EXHIBITION  
 IN USE FOR THE EXHIBITION  
 IN USE FOR THE EXHIBITION  
 IN USE FOR THE EXHIBITION

Paul Smith Exhibition 2013

PAUL'S OFFICE  
 THE WORLD BEHIND THE SCENE  
 PAUL'S FASHION TO FOLLOW  
 THE DESIGN STUDIO  
 LOCAL MANUFACTURING  
 APPT. HALL, A  
 APPT. HALL, B  
 THE FASHION DESIGNER  
 THE COLLECTIONS

HELLO, MY NAME IS PAUL SMITH 10th NOVEMBER 2013 TO 8th MARCH 2014

Display Area 534 Square Metres

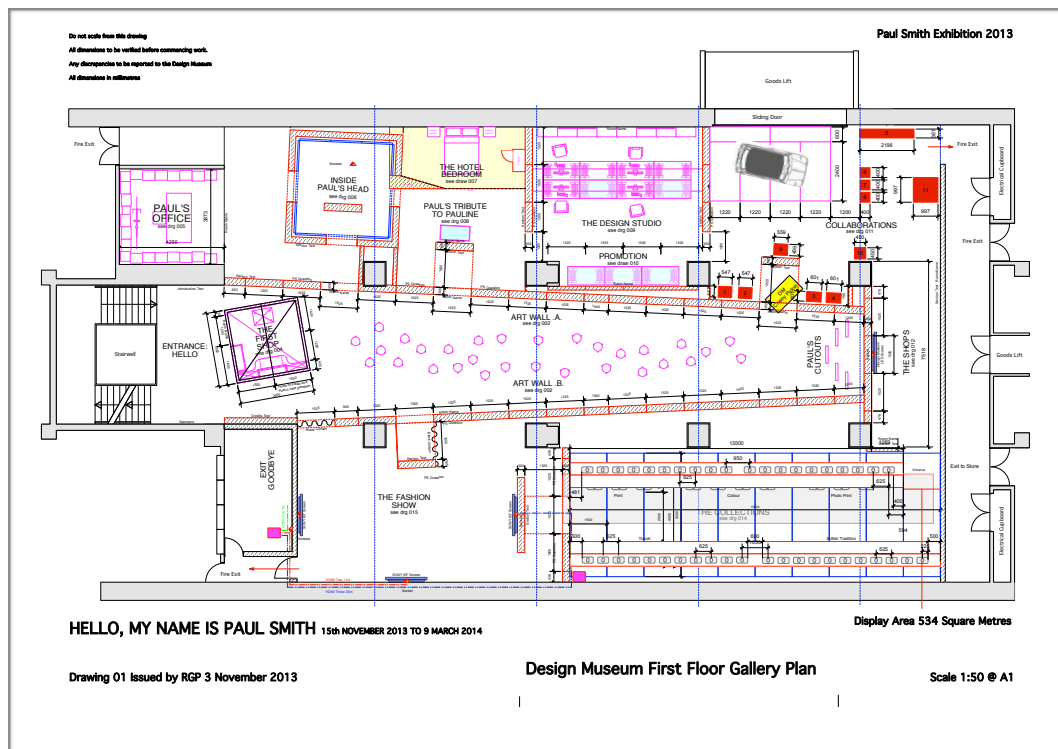
Drawing 01 Issued by RGP 12 September 2013

Design Museum First Floor Gallery Plan

Scale 1:50 @ A1

The issue of the final iteration of the exhibition design (issued 3 November 2013) is a significant moment in the design process representing a consensus reached by the curator, the project team and the Design Museum, with final sign-off on the exhibition layout, content and interpretation given by the Director. When taken as a whole, the plans for the exhibition show an evolution in the design of the exhibition following a series of protracted discussions. They also serve to support the idea that an exhibition is formed of a nexus of relationships and contributions from

all those involved in the exhibition-making process.



**Fig. 77:** Final iteration of exhibition design for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, Issued by RGP: 3 November 2013.

A PDF of the final version of the Exhibition Design can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P6).

#### 4.7 Stage 4: Content and Interpretation January - August 2013

##### Developing content

Decisions about content for an exhibition can often be the most protracted and negotiated stage of the curating process. It places the curator who selects objects for an exhibition in a challenging position, stating preferences which can be contrary to the preferences of the designer. I approached the process of selection carefully recognising that this process would need to be discussed with Smith. I was also aware of the potential of the selection to establish a creative dialogue between the objects, their environments and the audience, as cultural sociologist, Tiffany Jenkins, has stated:-

“Every exhibition is an interpretation. The role of the curator is to select and guide us through his or her narrative about the objects on show...This can create great exhibitions, when a curator’s expertise and eye enlightens.”<sup>435</sup>

My research for the exhibition revealed Smith as a designer who had amassed a vast quantity of objects through his life and career. Observers would describe him as a collector owning many different types of collections; art, photography, ephemera and objects but Smith has always resisted this definition:-

“I don’t consider myself a collector as I believe a collector is an expert on the things he or she collects and I am not, but I do enjoy the things I have for many different reasons. Sometimes I get inspiration, sometimes pleasure and other times they make me smile.”<sup>436</sup>

Clearly for Smith, objects have the ability to inspire and amuse and to help him see the world in a new way. A book published by Paul Smith in 2001, called *You Can Find Inspiration in Everything (and if you can’t, look again)*, reinforced this philosophy.<sup>437</sup>

In constructing a rationale for selecting objects, I put myself in the position of an “object biographer”. The Pitt-Rivers museum at the University of Oxford uses the term “Object Biographies” to describe information about some of the artefacts in the founding collection of the museum. The premise is based on the fact that every object has its history as every person has his own biography.<sup>438</sup> At the heart of the notion of biography are questions about the links between people and things; about the ways of meanings and values are accumulated and transformed. Gosden and Marshall suggest that the notion of object biography rests on the fact that

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<sup>435</sup> Tiffany Jenkins, ‘Human Creativity is not Frozen in Time’, *Spiked*, 2013. Available at: <http://www.spiked-online.com> (Accessed 20.10.16).

<sup>436</sup> *Inside Paul Smith...his Art, his Photography, his World*, Seoul: Daelim Contemporary Art Museum, 2010: 7.

<sup>437</sup> Paul Smith, *You Can Find Inspiration in Everything (and if you can’t, look again)*, London: Violette Editions, 2001.

<sup>438</sup> Pitt-Rivers Museum web archive: ‘Rethinking Pitt Rivers: Analysing the activities of a nineteenth century collector’. Available at: <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.html> (Accessed 20.10.16)

not only do objects change through their existence but they often have the capability of accumulating histories, so that the present significance of an object derives from the person or events to which it is connected.<sup>439</sup> The objects selected for the Design Museum exhibition were significant, not only for their own physical appearance and history, but also for the fact that they were inextricably linked to the designer who had acquired them, and whose story the exhibition was communicating.

It is widely recognised that objects can have great poetic power and resonance over our imaginations. They can help us remember the past and to engage with the present. They can stir up many kinds of emotions, including playfulness, poignancy, reverence and fear. Exhibitions are not only about individual objects, they are also about collections of ‘things’. Groups of objects can be as interesting as individual objects and they can exert a different power over us. In *Collected*, published in 2014, Fritz Karch and Rebecca Robertson presented a series of collections as a way of identifying the scope of possibilities for displaying collections. In structuring the book, they chose not to focus on the collectibles themselves but instead on the collectors. In the author’s view, “collections were invariably an extension of their owner’s personality, style and quirks, a reflection of subliminal impulses and often irrational ardour.”<sup>440</sup> Their organising framework divide collectors into various ‘tribes’ which include the Minimalist, the Maximalist, the Machinist and the Fantasist.

In a study of thirty people living along a single street in South London, anthropologist Daniel Miller explores how people express themselves through their possessions, and what those possessions communicate about their lives. Miller states that the study was an experiment in learning how to read people through their possessions.<sup>441</sup> Increasingly, as people’s

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<sup>439</sup> C. Gosden and Y. Marshall, ‘The Cultural Biography of Objects’, *World Archaeology* Vol 31 no 2: 169-178, 1999: 172.

<sup>440</sup> Fritz Karch and Rebecca Robertson, *Collected: Living with the things you love*, New York: Abrams, 2014: 8.

<sup>441</sup> Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008: 1-2.



lives take place behind the closed doors of private houses, he argues that objects generate insights into people's feelings, frustrations, aspirations, tragedies and delights. In one interview, an individual spoke of the ways in which toys help her children to develop and store their own memories of childhood:-

“If you have objects it triggers so much more, it triggers the moment that you bought the object...and it triggers the visual...and I think a lot of children do remember things visually.”<sup>442</sup>

The theories seemed to underpin Smith's rationale for creating collections. I adopted an anthropological approach to the objects I selected for the Design Museum exhibition with a view to understanding what objects communicated about the designer and his interests and how they influenced his work?

As an exploration of Smith's extensive photographic archive had confirmed, Smith was an enthusiastic photographer, and had been taking photographs for many years, recording the sights around him with an instant camera. The archive is now catalogued, stored digitally and managed by his team. The archive is wide-ranging, comprising photographs taken in a tiny Italian village of the things people hang in their rear-view mirrors (that prompted a design for an invitation); a display of tomatoes in a street market in Soho, London (that led to ideas about how to display clothes); a bus with an image of the Duomo in Florence printed on the side of it (that led to the design for a skirt); garden seed packets (that became the front for one of his most popular shirts) or a sign seen on a business trip to South Africa that read: “Penguins on parking area, check under your vehicle before departing.”

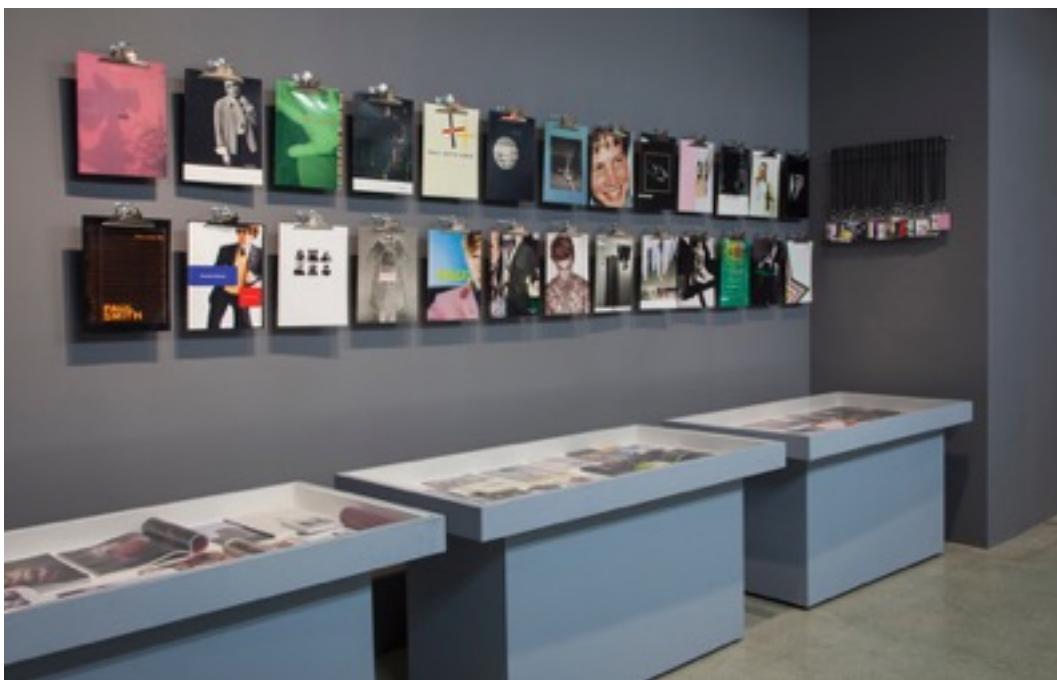
Smith's passion for photography can be traced to his father. Harold Smith was a credit draper in Nottingham who was also a keen amateur photographer. In his spare time, he would develop his photographs in a homemade dark room in the attic of the house. Smith would often assist.

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<sup>442</sup> Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008: 130.

The influence on Smith of his father's interest in photography was confirmed by locating a catalogue in the archive for an exhibition at the Beeston Camera Club organised by Harold Smith, a founder member of the club. The Rolleiflex camera used by his father was also found in an unmarked archive box.<sup>443</sup>

The objects informed a space within the exhibition that communicated Smith's passion for photography. An area called *Promotion* presented a selection of Paul Smith marketing campaigns, many of which had been shot by Smith himself. The section ended with a small wall-mounted display case that presented two cameras; Harold Smith's Rolleiflex camera alongside the camera given to Smith by his father on his eleventh birthday which had inspired a lifelong passion for taking photographs.



**Fig. 78:** 'Promotion' in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

During design meetings there were numerous discussions about the most effective way to display numerous objects of differing scales selected for the exhibition in a relatively confined series of spaces. I was acutely aware that the means of display would play a vital role in the way in which the

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<sup>443</sup> Catalogue of Beeston Camera Club annual exhibition with foreword by Harold Smith, Paul Smith Ltd Company Archive.

visitor engaged with the object and the way in which the exhibition communicated its key message as a whole. In the same way that the theatre space and stage set influences the reception of a play, objects in exhibitions are influenced by the context in which they are viewed.

My intention was to create a series of spaces within the exhibition in which the objects helped to communicate and reinforce a particular theme or storyline. As the narrative structure devised for the exhibition showed, the exhibition would flow through a variety of spaces and the visitor would be invited to follow signs or clues to each element. My thinking was influenced by artist and critic, Robert Storr in the 2006 publication, *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* in which he observed:-

“Ordinary people are sensitive to their surroundings and what is in them if you let them be. Based on that basic aptitude they are or can become visually literate if you lead them into and through spaces filled with things in a manner that encourages them to head the clues they are consciously or subliminally picking up, clues that the exhibition-maker has left for them.”<sup>444</sup>

Storr’s viewpoint connects to the research of Sandra Dudley. In *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, Dudley explores the particular qualities of the museum as a context for person-object engagements. She considers the ways and contexts in which ‘things’ and people mutually interact, and raises questions about how objects carry meaning and feeling. Dudley writes:-

“Museums’ preference for the informational over the material, and for learning over personal experience more broadly and fundamentally conceived, may risk the production of displays which inhibit or even preclude much affective responses. Inevitably, the object-information package can still have the power to move us, but most often does so entirely through textually-provided meaning, and threatens to foreclose a more basic, but no less potent, bodily and emotional response to the material itself.”<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Robert Storr, ‘Show and Tell’ in Paula Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Press, 2006: 23.

<sup>445</sup> Sandra Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, London: Routledge, 2008: 8.

Visiting museums and exhibitions has been a key part of my practice as a curator serving as reference points and often inspiring new approaches to the display of objects. In planning my approach to the selection and display of objects for the exhibition, I looked to a number of earlier examples of the methods used by collectors to display objects. During my research for the exhibition, I uncovered a magazine interview with Smith in which he explained that he would often take visitors to Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields, a museum which was clearly a source of enjoyment and inspiration. The museum was a personal favourite and I took the opportunity to pay a return visit to the museum.

The house, museum and library were designed by the nineteenth century architect Sir John Soane (1753-1837). Soane was a leading architect of his generation, and as Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy, the house that he created reflects his love of architecture, sculpture and collecting which he made available to his architecture students. It is filled with his exceptional collection of artefacts, paintings, casts and fragments from antique and medieval buildings. The interiors and collections, at his request, are still displayed as they were at the time of his death in 1837.<sup>446</sup>

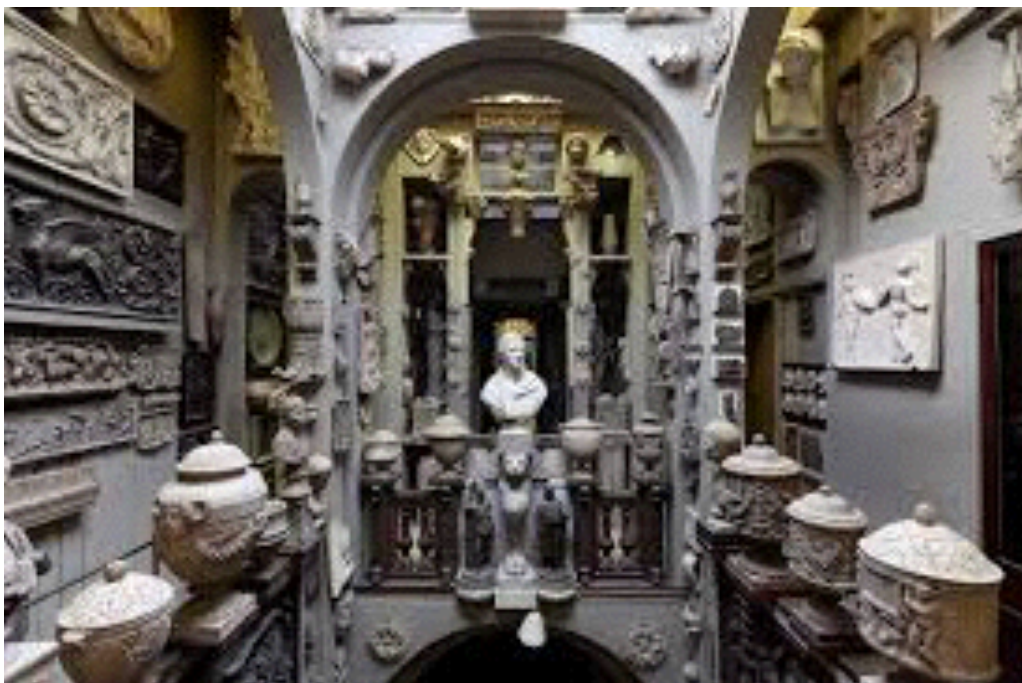
The transition between a private home and public museum is an interesting one. The historic house museum is, in itself, an object where visitors learn about the artist who lived there, the way they lived and worked and the spaces they inhabited. They were often the creation of an individual who displayed a collection amassed over a lifetime. The once private house becomes a public museum which actively displays, interprets, reflects and speculates. It was an amalgam of a home, office, collector's trove and personal showplace. The house comes closer to the concept of the Cabinets of Curiosities, popular in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and discussed in Chapter 1 (1.1). They created an overall environment, a stage-like setting of carefully designed interiors filled with objects designed to fascinate and intrigue. They also established

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<sup>446</sup> Sir John Soane's Museum, 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3BP. Available at: <https://www.soane.org/about> (Accessed 3.07.17).  
Tim Knox, *Sir John Soane's Museum, London*, London: Merrell, 2016.

a new relationship between the collector, the collection and the invited visitor.

It was also interesting to note the devices that Soane used to display content and to create additional storage space. Hinged cupboard doors open to reveal secret compartments to store and display a growing collection. Behind one such door was revealed Hogarth's famous series of the *Rakes Progress*. The house was interesting for me as it suggested that Soane was storytelling, using the house in three dimensions and the objects within it, to tell a very particular story about himself and, by so doing, conveying his character and interests. It can be argued that the Soane Museum is a form of autobiography where Soane used the collections to tell stories about the world and about himself.



**Fig. 79:** Interior of Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London.

In the same way, the Dennis Severs house in Spitalfields, London presents a reconstruction of an eighteenth century merchant's house. Created in the 1980s, Californian artist, Dennis Severs, created the interiors for his own personal enjoyment as well as to create an atmosphere, which he then utilised to provide the visitor with an extraordinary experience. The visitor enters the house interrupting a family

of Huguenot silk weavers who can be heard, but who always seem to be just out of sight. The journey continues through the ten rooms, each with arresting reflections, textures, sounds and smells. Severs describes the visitor experience as a “still-life drama”. His aim is to provide visitors with a rare moment in which to become as lost in another time as they appear to be in their own.<sup>447</sup>



**Fig. 80:** Interior of The Dennis Severs House, Spitalfields, London.

The curatorial approaches of the Sir John Soane’s Museum and the Dennis Severs House support the idea that people love to enter curious and hidden miniature worlds. For the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, I wanted to create something of the same experience offered by the historic house museum in which visitors had the sense of entering the hidden world of the designer. When confronted by an array of objects in physical space, there are moments of interrogation, reflection and recognition and a natural motivation to piece together a human story. My approach was to find ways to engage the visitor at an emotive level and, in so doing, attach a personal memory to the experience of the visit.

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<sup>447</sup> The Dennis Severs' House, 18 Folgate Street, London E1 6BX. Available at: [www.dennissevershouse.co.uk](http://www.dennissevershouse.co.uk) (Accessed 3.07.17).



I developed an exhibits list which was divided into the different thematic sections of the exhibition. In an attempt to establish connections between objects, I began with a process of grouping objects together. An image of each object was helpful in terms of being able to order, and reorder, groupings on the list. I started to establish a hierarchy of objects led by a series of “trigger objects”. As previously discussed, these were individual objects that I had defined as being significant in the Paul Smith story requiring a special, elevated place within the exhibition and helping to reinforce each part of the exhibition narrative.

The exhibits list was also important to keep track of the many hundreds of objects selected for the exhibition and to record information such as date, medium and source which would inform the text for exhibit captions to be written later in the curating process.

HELLO, MY NAME IS PAUL SMITH: EXHIBIT LIST				
Section	Image	Title	Date	Medium
ENTRANCE: HELLO		Introduction to the exhibition		
PS wall: Nick		First postcard with PS logo for sale		
		Exhibition title + first panel		
1. THE FIRST SHOP		Recreation of Paul's first shop at 8 Byard Lane, Nottingham		
PS wall: Nick		3 x 3 ft plywood box, exterior painted pink		
		Paints free chosen		
		Mirror covering one wall		
		Reproduction of shop as depicted in 1970 3 x 3 ft		
		Spotlights		
		PS sign outside shop "Paul Smith, vibrant postcard"		PS panel
		Graphic of Paul inside first shop with newspaper		PS panel
		Graphic of human figure found and manager		
		Green table with:		
		Art Deco cash box		
		Handwritten diary		
		Set of prints with press for Paul's first gallery, 8 Byard Lane	1970-75	
		Black book recording sales through first found	1970-75	
		Open for message: 24 hours open 24 hours		
		Single prints for Paul Smith: 24 hours open 24 hours		
		Poster announcing opening of shop at 8 Byard Lane, Nottingham	1970	
		Letter agreement between Paul and father for loan of money £8k	1970	
		Postcard flyer for 10 Byard Lane (last of several)	1970	
		First business card: Paul S. Smith, 30 Abbey Road, Leicester		
		Many sketches for Paul Smith logo		
		Business card for 10 Byard Lane	1970	
		Early photos of Paul with parents, with father on beach, in school uniform, teenage		
		Letters to Paul from parents with press cuttings		
		"Paul's gem of a date", Paul with parents on their diamond wedding anniversary		
		Nottingham Evening Post		
		Nottingham		
		Camp Log - geography field trip to the Pennines	1960	
		Paul's first camera, aged 11 + dark room box		
		Paul's first photo (LIFE, Leicester Camera Club exhibition)		
		Photos of Paul with friends		
		Photo of Paul with friends (LIFE) + washed car		
		Various photos of Paul - formal, in Japan, Pacific		
		Photo interview with Paul - BBC Today, 1978	30 Aug 78	
		First panel		
2. THE BIT IN THE MIDDLE		Orientation area		
PS wall: Nick / Lance		Art Wall - framed images lead to wall		
		Public covered outdoor as visitor seating		
		End of corridor - 30 images cut out of Paul (book cover image)		
		First panel		

**Fig. 81:** A first iteration of the exhibits list for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

## The role of graphic design

An important interpretation device in the exhibition were the exhibition graphics. Successful exhibition graphics help the visitor to navigate both

the space and the storyline of an exhibition. They define the context and atmosphere of the story. They also help to create an experience and through this, enhance the visitor's intellectual engagement as well as appeal to their senses and imagination. In spite of their importance, the role of graphics in exhibitions continues to be an overlooked and under-researched area.

Graphics are driven by the content of an exhibition. My experience curating exhibitions had shown me that graphics need to respond to the narrative, to the audience and to the space. They need to be clear, inclusive and accessible and the content and should not interfere with, or overpower the objects, but provide a perfect stage for the objects. Working closely with the curator and the exhibition designer, the role of the graphic designer is to create an overall structure and develop a sequence for the arrangement of the content in thematic clusters. This is achieved through the typographic design and placement of all the graphic elements in an exhibition which will have been outlined in a graphics brief written by the curator.

Exhibition graphics can take various forms; an arrow on a wall pointing to the next section of the exhibit, a headline, a quotation, a large image applied to a wall or the inside of a display case, a small label that contains information about an object or a text panel delivering contextual information. *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* utilised all of these graphic forms. The starting point for the graphic designer was to create a visual framework for the exhibition that fulfilled two purposes, to set the scene and to provide a system of information that did not compete with the objects on display. An identity for the exhibition was developed with a strong colour palette and a series of playful pictograms in which words, arrows and colour became an architecture in themselves.

The graphic approach was also used as a means of communicating the personality of the designer. The idea of bringing the voice and character of Smith into the exhibition surfaced early in the curatorial process.



Discussions at design meetings focused on the ways in which this could be achieved through text, image and sound. As I drafted exhibition text for the main section panels and object captions, I referenced the interview undertaken with Smith. I became interested in the possibility that quotes or a short soundbite from the designer could introduce each section of the exhibition narrative and introduce the key idea in each room. This could also help to convey a sense of the designer being present in the space and walking the visitor through the exhibition. At design meetings, the discussions around graphics centred on decisions about the titles for each room and which quotes were appropriate to use.

A PDF of the final panel text for the exhibition can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P8).

The approach also influenced the choice of title for the exhibition. Decisions about an exhibition title can take many months of discussion with the Design Museum team. The Communications team were keen to start to promote the exhibition as early as possible and a title needed to be found. A number of suggestions were put forward by the museum team and the Paul Smith team. It was the graphic approach that inspired the choice of exhibition title. The idea of using short quotes from Smith to introduce each section in the exhibition and to communicate Smith's curiosity, energy, humour, wit and warmth inspired the decision to call the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.



**Fig. 82:** A discussion relating to exhibition graphics during a design meeting for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

A PDF of suggested titles for the exhibition can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P5). The Press Release and invitation to the Press Briefing for the exhibition can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P7).

### **Selecting display furniture and props**

Once the selection and placement of objects had been decided, it was necessary to consider how the objects should be displayed and protected. The regulation of distance, both between objects, and between visitors and objects, is integral to curating in a museum setting. In exhibitions the distance between the visitor and the objects is determined as within, or out of, arm's reach. Within arm's reach requires a barrier, for example rope or glass. Out of arm's reach removes the threat of touch and which is so often increased with the presence of fabrics or small objects. Curators have a duty of care towards the objects and towards the lenders who entrust their objects to them. Conditions of care influence curatorial decisions about an object's display and accessibility. In *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, an unusual proximity was created between the objects and the visitor with a deliberate intention not to introduce glass display cases. In particular areas, such as 'Paul's Office' and 'The Design Studio, there was little option but to place a barrier between the display and the visitor because of the sheer volume of objects on open display, some very small and also the fact that many of the objects were unique pieces from the designer's archive. A slim barrier was placed directly across each of the spaces to prevent visitors from entering the space, but which still allowed a close engagement with the objects.

In addition to display cases, other methods of display were discussed at length during design meetings. Key discussions took place as to how to display the clothes selected for The Collections tunnel. There are a wide range of styles of mannequins available and decisions needed to be made as to the preferred style for showing the clothes. Mannequins are an important design element that can enhance an exhibition, they can also be

one of the most costly elements of the exhibition budget. For the Design Museum exhibition, I approached three different mannequin suppliers and requested sample mannequins to show to the Paul Smith team at a design meeting for the exhibition. At the meeting, three different style of mannequins were dressed by the display manager at Paul Smith. A general consensus was reached that half length mannequins mounted on poles were preferable as the poles could be mounted into a long, low plinth structures. Mannequins without heads were chosen, with articulated arms, so that the arms could be rotated to create different poses and convey a sense of movement.



**Fig. 83:** Reviewing different mannequin styles at a design meeting for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*.

A further consideration later in the design process was the inclusion of seating. Reesa Greenberg has written about the importance of seating within a gallery space when the visitor is confronted with standing to look, especially when reading extensive text. She argues that without the invitation extended by seating to linger in an assignation with art, the encounter becomes pedestrian, “seating is conducive to the prolonged gaze, its absence encourages a passing glance.”<sup>448</sup> For the Design Museum exhibition, long, low benches were placed along the length of the central orientation space, ‘the bit in the middle’, to encourage visitors to

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<sup>448</sup> Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996: 351.

spend longer in the space and view the artwork displayed on surrounding walls.

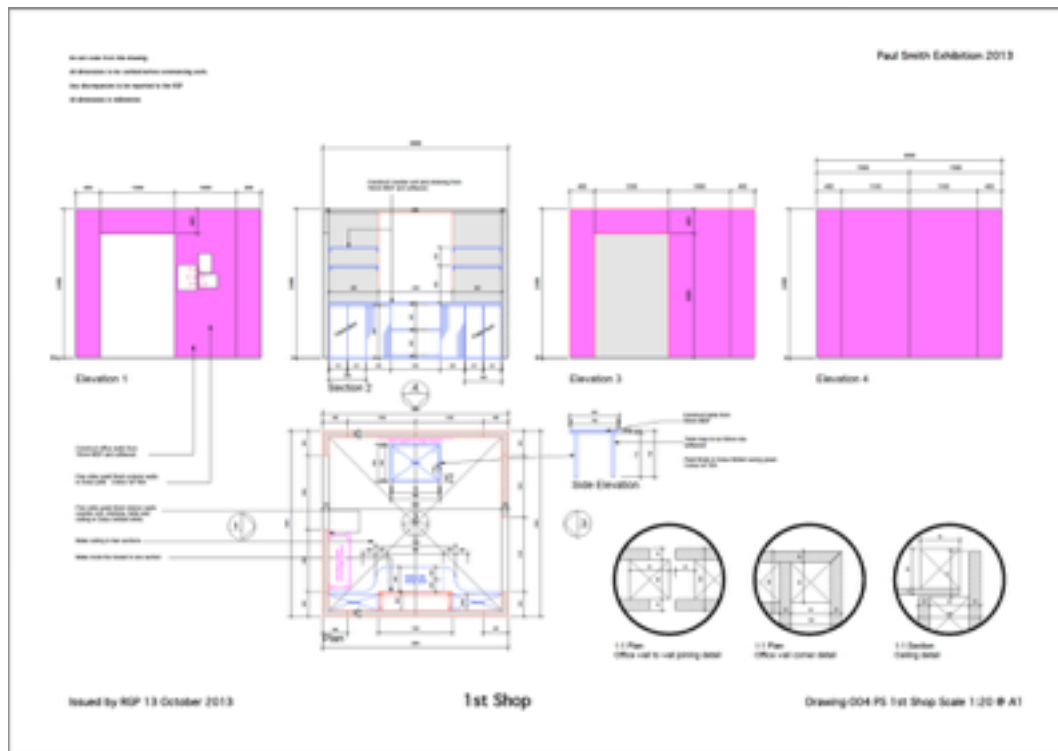


**Fig. 84:** 'The bit in the middle' in *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, Design Museum, 2013.

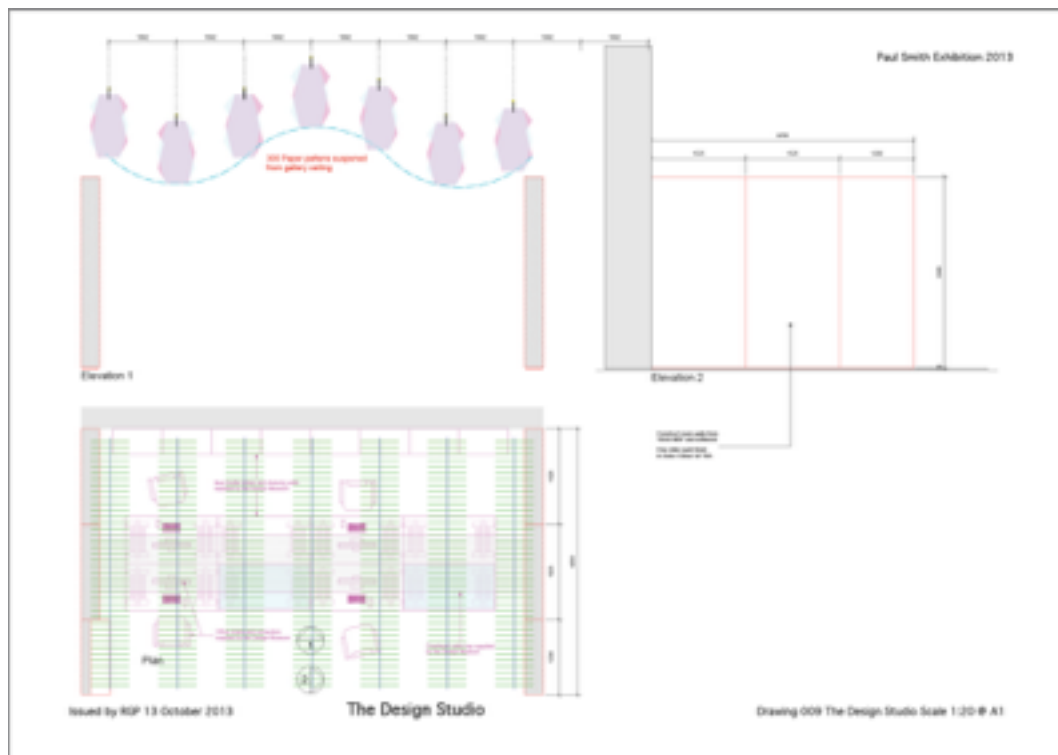
#### **4.8 Stage 5: Production and Installation** September - November 2013

##### **Final drawings**

A significant moment in the planning of an exhibition is the move from the detailed design stages to the production and installation of the exhibition. Design drawings become final tender drawings and elevations issued to a contractor, appointed by the curator, who will construct and build the exhibition off-site over a four week period.



**Fig. 85:** Tender drawing for 'The First Shop', *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, Issued by RGP: 13 October 2013.



**Fig. 86:** Tender drawing for 'The Design Studio', *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, Issued by RGP: 13 October 2013.

## The installation

A key pressure point for the installation was ensuring that all elements commissioned for the exhibition, in particular the exhibition film and software for the digital installation, 'Inside Paul's Head', would be ready in time. It was also important to assess the length of time certain tasks would take. A particular concern was the time required to hang the large number of artworks in the central orientation area, 'the bit in the middle'. In order to ensure that all those involved in installing the exhibition were fully briefed, an installation schedule was devised, working closely with the exhibition project manager. The schedule recorded the tasks to be undertaken on each day of the installation period and by whom.<sup>449</sup> The exhibition was installed over a twelve day period and demonstrated an intensely collaborative working process. During the installation, members of the Paul Smith team were on site at various points to assist with the set-up and dressing of particular spaces, such as organising content in the 'The Design Studio', creating the stage set in 'The Hotel Bedroom' and dressing mannequins in 'The Collections'.

The exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, opened at the Design Museum on 15 November 2013. On 14 November, a media view was held for invited journalists in the centre of the exhibition space, 'the bit in the middle'. In the evening, a private view with 200 invited guests took place at the museum with speeches from the Design Museum Director, Deyan Sudjic, Designer, Paul Smith and Exhibition Curator, Donna Loveday.

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<sup>449</sup> Installation schedule for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, November 2013. Personal Archive.



**Fig. 87:** Narrative structure for the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*, the Design Museum, 2013.

PDFs of images of the exhibition in its final form can be viewed in the Portfolio of Work (P10).

#### 4.9 Stage 6: Evaluation and Critical Reflection

Following the opening of an exhibition, museums employ a range of strategies to measure an exhibition's success. Exhibitions are commonly quantified by 'footfall', a metric used to calculate the total number of visitors each day which is presented as a total visitor figure at the end of the exhibition. Measurable of success also include media reviews, both in advance of the exhibition opening and during the exhibition. Interest from international museums and venues in hosting an exhibition is also an indicator of success within the museum community.

Critical reception to exhibitions range widely and are frequently mixed. Reviews are important to museums because they affect attendance during the run of the exhibition but they also influence how an exhibition will be understood and remembered. Zoë Ryan has noted how reviews have



played an essential role in framing exhibitions in their own time, “in addition to providing insights for future generations, who with the advantage of hindsight, can come to understand these projects quite differently and appreciate how they have shaped architecture and design practice and discourse.”<sup>450</sup>

For the curator of an exhibition, reviews can often be helpful in validating the original aims for the exhibition. Writing in 2016, Terence Conran, the founder of the Design Museum reflected on what he considered to be landmark exhibitions at the museum:-

“I am a huge fan of fashion designer Paul Smith and was delighted with his 2013 exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* at the Design Museum. It brilliantly told the story of how his business developed from a relatively modest shop in Nottingham to a global organisation, flying the flag for British fashion so proudly all over the world. His approach to design, his inspirations, working methods and obsessions underpinned the entire exhibition.”<sup>451</sup>

Whilst Conran’s enthusiastic response to the exhibition might be seen to represent a somewhat biased view, his comments do support the original aims of the exhibition as an expression of the designer’s working process. This had been a key deliverable outlined in the concept document at the beginning of the curating process.

Other reviews of the exhibition served to support the curatorial aims behind the exhibition. On the first day of opening, the exhibition featured on the front page of *The Guardian*. In a double-page spread inside the newspaper, reviewer Jess Cartner-Morley applauded the fact that, in the exhibition, Smith’s fashion archive played a supporting role to his workplace and sources of inspiration.<sup>452</sup> Alongside the review, Oliver Wainwright commented in an opinion piece; “but the exhibition shows that

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<sup>450</sup> Zoë Ryan (ed.), *As Seen: Exhibitions that made Architecture and Design History*, The Art Institute of Chicago, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017: 14.

<sup>451</sup> Terence Conran, *My Life in Design*, London: Conran Octopus, 2016: 248.

<sup>452</sup> Jess Cartner-Morley, ‘Six of one: Exhibition celebrates Paul Smith’, *The Guardian*, 15 November 2013: 12-13.



there is much more to Smith's world than the signature stripes. What emerges is the picture of a man who is more a gatherer and curator than a straightforward designer."<sup>453</sup> Suzy Menkes writing in *The New York Times* commented on the fact that the exhibition perfectly captured the designer's wacky, whimsical spirit. She ends her review with the observation; "this Paul Smith exhibition gets to the fundamentals of design and how it can and should be not exclusive, but available to all."<sup>454</sup>

In a practical manual written for art curators published in 2015, curator Adrian George recommend that at the end of an exhibition, curators should review the entire project and their handling of it, "looking back and assessing what went well and what did not go so well."<sup>455</sup> At the Design Museum, "wash-up" meetings take place one month following the closing date of an exhibition. The purpose of the meeting is to reflect on the exhibition process and to give each member of the project team involved with the exhibition the opportunity to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the process. The outcome of the meeting identifies where processes could have been improved and the lessons learned are integrated into planning for future exhibitions. A wash-up meeting took place for *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* in December 2013.<sup>456</sup> Concerns were raised about the limited time for installation and a challenging exhibition budget but, in general, feedback from teams across the museum was overwhelmingly positive.

George also advocates the importance for curators to document their exhibitions. He suggest that curators should maintain a personal archive from the outset. Documentation will support any future plans for the exhibition, such as requests for information from researchers and the

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<sup>453</sup> Oliver Wainwright, 'A designer of boundless energy', *The Guardian*, 15 November 2013: 13.

<sup>454</sup> Suzy Menkes, 'Paul Smith's World of Wit and Whimsy', *The New York Times*, 2 December 2013.

<sup>455</sup> Adrian George, *The Curator's Handbook: Museums, Commercial Galleries, Independent Spaces*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2015: 303.

<sup>456</sup> Wash-up meeting, curator's notes, December 2013. Personal Archive.

public, or from venues if the exhibition tours. The documentation will also serve to inform future curatorial practice. Terry Smith has also stressed the importance of archiving curatorial process in order to ensure that a reflexive practice is built and maintained, as he comments:-

“I would love to see curators keeping detailed records of every stage of their thinking and planning, to read statements as to how they pre-visualised exhibitions, including how these ideas changed during the hang. I would love to follow their version, learning by walking through the exhibition and their sense of what various audiences made of it. Of course, it would be great to have records of visitor responses, of the spectator’s emancipation, but it would be a major step forward to see more writing by curators about other exhibitions that have inspired their own, or were curated in response to theirs, or simply were devoted to the same artists, about a similar issue. Making visible this dialogue between exhibitions would be to articulate what we have posted as the core, distinctive, unique medium of curatorial discourse. Doing so is essential to the advancement of curatorial thought.”<sup>457</sup>

The final part of this thesis concludes with a summary of the key shifts and examples of practice discussed in Chapters 1 to 4. In so doing, I attempt to reflect on, and understand the implications of my research for the practice of design curating in the museum and the expanded role of the design curator.

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<sup>457</sup> Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2012: 253-4.

## CONCLUSION

**“It could be said that the role of the curator has shifted from a governing position that presides over taste and ideas to one that lies amongst art (or objects) in space and audience.”**

Kate Fowle (2007)<sup>458</sup>

### Reflections on Research and Implications for Professional Practice

This practice-informed PhD thesis opened with a proposition, that curating design has become a fast-emerging and dynamic field of curatorial practice.

As Kate Fowle’s statement suggests, the role of the curator has come a long way from its traditional definition as a “guardian”, “overseer” or “carer” of collections. It has expanded beyond its traditional parameters to become a diverse practice, located within the institution and outside of it. As research for this thesis has identified, since the late 1990s, there have been a plethora of publications on curating but they have mostly focused on the area of fine art curation, with design curation remaining largely unexplored and the design curator’s *raison d’être* undefined.

This thesis has attempted to map and explore the key moments that are pertinent to the development of the design museum, the design exhibition and the practice of design curating. Perhaps the most important impact on this development is the fact that, from the 1980s, a new type of specialist museum emerged on the global stage focusing on the collection, study and exhibition of modern and contemporary design.

The research and investigation was triggered by a set of questions that set out to understand the practice of curating design in a contemporary context. Adopting the research methodology of “reflective practitioner”, four research questions provided a framework for the thesis; What is unique about the practice of curating design?, What are the key shifts that

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<sup>458</sup> Kate Fowle, ‘Who cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today’ in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, apexart 2007: 16.

have influenced design curating practice over the last two decades?, How can design exhibitions draw audiences into personal, transformative encounters with the work displayed?, How has my research contributed to professional practice at the Design Museum, and more broadly to the field of design curation? I chose to focus my research on the relationships and practices that constitute the design exhibition through an analysis of an exhibition I curated for the Design Museum in 2013, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith*. The research was designed to reveal what has been largely concealed, how design exhibitions are curated and the distinctiveness of the role of the design curator. It also provides a perspective on the more recent developments in design curating as practice and discourse within the context and culture of the Design Museum, London.

I began work on the exhibition, *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* in 2012 and this PhD is submitted in 2018. In the intervening six years and as my professional roles have changed, my perspectives have shifted. In 2015 I decided to leave the full-time employment of the Design Museum and establish myself as a freelance curator where I have developed my practice outside of an institutional context. I continue to lead the MA Curating Contemporary Design programme at the Design Museum which has enabled me to further research and explore the expanding role of the design curator.

The last two decades have witnessed significant changes to the operating landscape for museums in the UK resulting in a rapidly shifting landscape for curatorial practice. Fluctuating budgets, advances in digital technologies and evolving audience expectations have presented new challenges, but also opportunities for contemporary curators. In the present moment, the field is being influenced by a multitude of cross-cultural and global conversations which are opening up new definitions, processes and ways of working. Over the last twenty years critical analysis of design exhibitions has grown exponentially. This has done much to reinforce the merit of design curating as a practice and as a subject worthy of study.

In 2018 the perception of the curator as primarily the guardian of a collection is no longer relevant, nor is it a useful way of understanding the role of the design curator. Curating is now articulated as a constantly shifting and adaptive discipline. It is a multifaceted practice that has changed the key constituents of the curator's role. Niamh Tuft, a programme manager for Architecture, Design and Fashion at the British Council, London considers curation to be primarily about testing ideas, telling stories and taking a critical position.<sup>459</sup> She cites the very active role that curators have at the British Council in commissioning new work or developing ideas with designers and creatives working now as an exciting development. This increasingly collaborative relationship with practitioners puts curators in the position of creating design as well as observing, collecting and presenting it. The research for this thesis has revealed how the curator can now be understood as auteur, communicator, commissioner, cultural producer, editor, exhibition-maker, facilitator, mediator, platform provider, project manager, programmer, provocateur, risk-taker, sense maker and storyteller.

The research has also demonstrated the value of studying particular sites of activity within design curating practice. My methods have sought to render visible the ideas and processes involved in the creation of design exhibitions, and in so doing, understand how the practice of curating design is aligned with wider debates in design and society. The findings that have emerged from the individual chapters of this thesis have revealed a series of themes that, when taken together, foster an understanding of design curating as a developing practice. They have revealed much about the current landscape for contemporary design and its concomitant practice. In addition, the shape of the debate for design museums and design curators for the next decade is already emerging in outline.

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<sup>459</sup> Interview with Niamh Tuft, alumni of MA Fashion Curation, London College of Fashion. Available at: <https://www.arts.ac.uk/colleges/london-college-of-fashion/people/niamh-tuft> (Accessed 19.10.18).

In 2013 Alice Rawsthorn, a design critic and former director of the Design Museum, London, implied a need to set out a clear meaning for design and its importance in a contemporary context:-

“Design is a complex, often elusive phenomenon that has changed dramatically over time by adopting different guises, meanings and objectives in different contexts, but its elemental role is to act as an agent of change, which can help us to make sense of what is happening around us, and to turn it to our advantage.”<sup>460</sup>

Since opening in 1989, the Design Museum has provided a platform for the many views of what design can be, through its exhibitions programme, learning and public programme, design awards and residencies. An analysis of its programming activity since 1989 and its changing mission statements suggest a continual attempt by the museum and its curators to capture, interpret and communicate a rapidly changing landscape for design.

Given the substantive developments in the design industry towards service economies and digital manufacturing, curators have increasingly needed to grapple with the question of how to communicate and engage audiences with these developments and the more intangible, conceptual and strategic dimensions of design. Conceptual, critical, social and speculative design have sparked new lines of inquiry focused as much on asking questions as suggesting solutions.

The Design Museum introduces the exhibitions page on its website with the statement; “design is a continually evolving subject.”<sup>461</sup> A visible expression of this statement is the museum’s annual exhibition and awards, *Beazley Designs of the Year* which celebrates the most original and exciting products, concepts and designers around the world. The exhibition is now in its eleventh year and has become a core part of the museum’s programme. Reviewers have picked up on the exhibition’s

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<sup>460</sup> Alice Rawsthorn, *Hello World: Where Design Meets Life*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013: 9.

<sup>461</sup> Design Museum - Exhibitions. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions> (Accessed 19/10/18).

ability to act as a barometer for the changing meaning and impact of design. *Channel 4* has described it as “the wacky and the wonderful, life-saving or just mind-changing...these are the people designing our future.” Similarly, *The Times* commented; “From the brilliant to the brutal...a glimpse into what the world of tomorrow may look like.”<sup>462</sup>

Other sites of design curating practice are exploring similar themes and issues. The theme of the second London Design Biennale at Somerset House in September 2018 provided a diverse, global commentary on what the curators described as “our emotionally turbulent times.” Installations were presented by forty countries, cities and territories across six continents. The installations were curated by leading museums and design institutions including the V&A; Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian; Triennale, Milan and Qatar Museums. They interrogated the ways in which design affects every aspect of people’s lives and influences emotions and experiences; “together the Biennale presents an exciting laboratory of ideas that investigates the important relationship between design, strong emotional responses and real social needs.”<sup>463</sup>

Curators are responding to these shifting meanings and parameters of design which can often bring unexpected outcomes. The Design Museum’s exhibition, *Hope to Nope: Graphics and Politics 2008-18* (28 March - 12 August 2018) explored how graphic design and technology have played a pivotal role in dictating and reacting to the major political moments of recent times. It considered how graphic design in the form of internet memes, posters and protest placards is being used by the marginalised and powerful alike to shape political messages like never before. During the exhibition, the Design Museum itself became a site of protest when artists and designers demanded that their works be removed from display in an open letter posted on the Campaign Against Arms Trade website. The letter was in response to the museum hosting a private event

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<sup>462</sup> Design Museum - Exhibitions - Beazley Designs of the Year. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/beazley-designs-of-the-year-2018> (Accessed 19/10/18).

<sup>463</sup> London Design Festival 2018: The Guide, 15-23 September 2018: 20-21.

on 17 July for *Leonardo*, an Italian leader in the aerospace and defence industry. As a result, the museum removed around a third of the artwork from the exhibition, before the exhibition's closing date, at the request of the lenders. The museum's website carried a short statement from Design Museum Directors, Deyan Sudjic and Alice Black;

"We are sorry for any disappointment caused for visitors. We believe that it is important to give political graphics a platform at the museum and it is a shame that the exhibition could not continue as it was curated until its original closing date."<sup>464</sup>

One of the most significant discussions in the field of contemporary design curating practice, as well as in cultural institutions more broadly, is how institutions can more successfully interact and engage with their visitors. Understanding audiences is now central to curatorial practice. Contemporary curatorial approaches are informed by a sophisticated understanding of the motivations for visiting an exhibition and the devices available to foster direct engagement with its content. This has been evidenced by a shift towards highly designed exhibition environments, with curators adopting approaches common to the leisure and retail industries, and extending these display strategies into the design exhibition.

Since the late 1990s educational theorists have promoted the idea that education and entertainment are related and complementary aspects of the museum experience. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill identified in 1994:-

"Entertainment in museums, however it might be presented, is used as a method of education, in the full knowledge that learning is best achieved in circumstances of enjoyment."<sup>465</sup>

For Hooper-Greenhill, whilst museums and galleries are fundamentally educational in character, entertainment in museums has the potential to offer something new, exciting and potentially valuable. The shift described has resulted in changes in the way that visitors experience the museum

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<sup>464</sup> Design Museum - Exhibitions - Hope to Nope. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/hope-to-nope-graphics-and-politics-2008-18> (Accessed 19/10/18).

<sup>465</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their Visitors*, London: Routledge, 1994: 140.



and the exhibition. A narrative approach has influenced the way in which the designed object is displayed in exhibitions and permanent displays. There has been a perceptible shift away from a modernist 'white cube' mode of display which elevates the object with limited or non-existent interpretation to a greater emphasis on the material culture of the object, its design process, how it is consumed and its relevance in the real world. A museum visit will be shaped by the narrative structure devised by the curator to create an individual's unique experience and bring them closer to the designer and their working process.

Such shifts are also presenting challenges to curators, particularly in relation to collecting design. Museums have experienced the transition from a post-industrial to a digital society operating in a global world. As Stephen Bayley observed in 2006, the original Design Museum was built at the end of the Machine Age, but since then assumptions about the value of solid things have changed; "the most valuable stuff in our economy is unquantifiable. It is electrons. The stylish legerdemain of presenting manufactured goods in a way that inspires excited sales - for so long a defining purpose of the design profession - is no longer a relevant business model."<sup>466</sup>

Processes and systems are increasingly dominating design practice with little or no intention to produce a tangible object as the final result. The materiality of objects is changing as they become flexible, ephemeral and may sometimes even disappear completely. Jana Scholze, formerly Curator of Contemporary Furniture and Product Design at the V&A, London and now Course Director for MA Curating Contemporary Design at Kingston School of Art, has discussed the challenge to curatorial practice represented by digital objects that resist traditional insistence on

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<sup>466</sup> Stephen Bayley, 'How the Design Museum lost its way', *The Spectator*, 13 August 2016. Available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2016/08/how-the-design-museum-lost-its-way-by-co-founder-stephen-bayley/> (Accessed 13.10.18).

singularity and provenance.<sup>467</sup> As design practice moves its focus to processes instead of individual material objects, Scholze advocates that documentation becomes the fundamental material and medium for design curators to collect, present and communicate to audiences.

Curator, Helen Pheby has suggested that this foray into dematerialisation has led to a rise in experiential art exhibitions, a shift from exhibitions being object-centred to being experience-centred. In Pheby's view, experiential art has become a defining characteristic of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>468</sup> As research for this thesis has shown, an emergent area of curatorial practice has been the way in which a curatorial concept is brought to life by creative collaborations and interpretive tools, notably those of exhibition design, digital technology and interactive display techniques used more commonly in other cultural contexts. The outcome is to create an exhibition narrative that increasingly embraces ideas of experience and immersion.

Education, entertainment, experience and empowerment are all words commonly used by design curators and represent an aspect of current thinking about engaging visitors with the design process in museums. The impact of this shift can be detected at the Design Museum and its stated curatorial aims for an exhibition planned for 2019; *Mars* (16 October 2019 - 1 March 2020). The exhibition will reveal how every detail in the endeavour to reach Mars, from spaceships used for the eight month journey to habitats that people will live in, is designed. The Design Museum website announces; "Illustrated through design fiction, the exhibition will feature an *immersive experience* that gives visitors a sense of the surface of Mars. It will focus on the raw and natural wonder of the

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<sup>467</sup> Jana Scholze, 'Ghosts and Dancers: Immaterials and the Museum' in Liz Farrelly and Joanna Weddell (eds.), *Design Objects and the Museum*, London: Bloomsbury, 2012: 61-69.

<sup>468</sup> Helen Pheby, 'Yes we can! The role of artists and art galleries in changing the world', *Culture Matters*, 3 April 2018. Available at: <https://culturematters.org.uk> (Accessed 15.10.18).

planet, to inspire visitors with the austere beauty of Mars. Several new commissions and collaborations by contemporary designers will be displayed in response to potential scenarios for the evolution of a Mars colony.”<sup>469</sup> Caroline Grewar, Head of Exhibitions at the Design Museum, explained that the museum is in conversation with a design team who will be able to create an exhibition environment that is “experiential and immersive.”<sup>470</sup>

Museums now have dedicated teams in their workforce managing the institution’s social media accounts so they are clearly prepared for this new form of participation. Photo-sharing online is now so popular that museums are responding to this phenomenon and exhibition curating is being affected by this desire for visitors to share experiences online. These new forms of visitor engagement have been more prevalent in art exhibitions but they are also signalling a change in the future format of design exhibitions. The digital age, and particularly social media and the use of Instagram in exhibitions, has changed the way in which people look at art and inevitably poses the question; could a design exhibition be more experiential leading to a rise in such installations at the design museum, as Alison Griffiths has commented; “our desire to become immersed in spaces that inspire awe and a sensation of being elsewhere is not likely to fade.”<sup>471</sup>

This becomes increasingly pertinent as museums face new challenges. According to figures released by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, museums have seen a rapid decline in visitors. Museums including the British Museum, National Gallery, Tate and V&A collectively welcomed 47.6 million people from April 2015 to March 2016, a significant fall from

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<sup>469</sup> Design Museum - Future Exhibitions - *Mars*. Available at: <https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/future-exhibitions/mars> (Accessed 10/10/18).

<sup>470</sup> Presentation by Caroline Grewar, Head of Exhibitions at the Design Museum, to MA CCD students at the Design Museum, 10 October 2018.

<sup>471</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums & the Immersive View*, Columbia University Press, 2013: 12.

the previous year and marking the end of a British museum boom that had become a matter of national pride.<sup>472</sup> A report on BBC News in 2017 discussed continuing low attendance figures at national museums. It suggested a possible reason could be that there are fewer so-called "blockbuster" exhibitions like the V&A's *David Bowie...Is* in 2013 which became the most visited show in the museum's history. Clearly, the challenge for curators is to find new ways of engaging young people who are typically spending less than fifteen minutes in front of a painting, and offering more immersive experiences.<sup>473</sup>

The developments and challenges discussed have created new contexts for the design curator and resulted in an expanded area of practice. The shifts have also called for a specialist skill set, to which a proliferation of postgraduate programmes and training courses have responded.

During the 1990s, the MA History of Design programme at the RCA and V&A provided an important training ground for design historians, who later entered the emerging field of design curating. Since 2000, new curating programmes have launched to train curators with an increasingly specialist skill set. Evidence of the impact of this development for design curators is the number of graduates from the MA Curating Contemporary Design programme, at Kingston School of Art in partnership with the Design Museum, London, who are taking up high profile posts across the sector. Catherine Ince, formerly a curator at the Barbican, London, is now Senior Curator with responsibility for developing the V&A East in Stratford opening in 2021. Nina Due, formerly Head of Exhibitions at the Design Museum, London, is now Director of the Röhsska Museum in Gothenburg. Sarah Mann, formerly Head of Learning and Participation at Somerset

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<sup>472</sup> Jonathan Jones, 'The drop in museum visitors reveals a nation without aspiration or hope', *The Guardian*, 2 February 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2017/feb/02/drop-uk-museum-attendance> (Accessed 19/10/18).

<sup>473</sup> 'Why are fewer people visiting UK museums and galleries?', *BBC News*, 3 February 2017. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-38853770> (Accessed 20.10.17).

House, is now Director of Architecture Design Fashion at The British Council. Sumitra Upham, previously Associate Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, is now Curator of Public Programmes at the Design Museum, London.

These curators are interpreting and communicating a rapidly changing landscape for contemporary design. They are also actively shaping the new discipline of design curating and contributing to its growing historiography. But as this thesis has suggested, curators need to do more to demystify their practice. This issue was raised at a symposium organised in September 2018 by the Design Museum in collaboration with students of the MA Curating Contemporary Design programme.<sup>474</sup> The symposium brought together leading curators and designers to publicly debate, critique and re-consider how design canons are formed. At a panel discussion debating the criteria for collecting in the twenty-first century museum, Corinna Gardner, Senior Curator of Design and Digital at the V&A, London, commented that, because the design world is always in flux, there is no fixed understanding of what a curator is, or does. She argued that “an openness and transparency of action is where curating needs to go.”<sup>475</sup>

### **Future Directions for Research**

It remains to consider and suggest future directions for this research. Until the writing-up stage of this thesis, I had considered my subject to be a reflection on the approaches and processes of curating a design exhibition. The investigation would extend the techniques available to the curator to create meaningful and stimulating exhibition environments that positively impact on the visitor experience.

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<sup>474</sup> *Re-Considering Canon in a Diverse World* was a half-day symposium organised by Kingston School of Art, FUMI and Design Museum, London and hosted by the Design Museum, 15 September 2018.

<sup>475</sup> Panel discussion ‘Criteria for Collecting in the 21st Century’, chaired by Debika Ray (Clove Magazine) with Corinna Gardner (V&A), Riya Patel (The Aram Gallery), Frederico Duarte (Birkbeck/V&A), *Re-Considering Canon in a Diverse World*, the Design Museum, London, 15 September 2018.

On reflection, I realise that what I have examined and documented is more than my original intention. This body of research has allowed me to reflect more broadly on current debates pertinent to the practice of curating design and within that context, to draw conclusions about ways to exhibit the design process and designed object. The research has enabled me to develop theories and ideas about curating design in the context of the museum and how design exhibitions can be experienced as dynamic and exciting places.

Hans Ulrich Obrist has urged curators to establish a critical distance from their practice and to document their methods. There is a need to collect exhibitions, in the same way that objects and processes are collected, particularly in light of the rise of digital documentation and the potential for the key conversations behind curating an exhibition to be lost. As Obrist has commented:-

“At a moment when there is so much talk about curating there is no exhibition literature...it has a lot to do with the fact that exhibitions are not collected and that’s why they fall deeper into amnesia.”<sup>476</sup>

He further claims that this amnesia “not only obscures our understanding of experimental exhibition history, it also effects innovative curatorial practice.” In his view exhibitions contribute to the creation of new curatorial knowledge and practices and they can also push the boundaries toward the invention of new curatorial structures. A reflection on practice offers a repertoire of presentation modes, previously not analysed or documented, that can be applied to the display of design in the museum.

In an article for *Blueprint* magazine in 2006, Claire Catterall, co-founder of Scarlett Projects and a former curator at the Design Museum, London, attempted to define the term, curating. She suggested that what sets curating apart from organising, selecting or even project managing an exhibition is the provision of both an artistic and an intellectual framework. The artistic framework is bound up in the recognition that the exhibition is

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<sup>476</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist cited in Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT, 2012: 41.

something that is experienced viscerally and, as such, is different from something that is experienced on a passive or intellectual level only, such as a book or a conference;

“The intellectual framework should also consider the narrative structure of the exhibition, the route through which the visitor should journey and engage with the idea, both on an emotional and intellectual level. Both of these constitute the voice of the curator, and it is this voice that defines the contemporary practice of curating...What the exhibition taught me was the power of experience over explanation to communicate ideas...I think the best curation combines this approach with a precise and articulate point of view.”<sup>477</sup>

Reflections on my own practice as a curator over twenty-five years supports Catterall’s view that design exhibitions can be structures for learning and experience. As a reflection on the curating process behind the exhibition, *Hello My Name is Paul Smith*, has demonstrated, a curatorial concept is brought to life by creative collaborations and interpretive tools to create an exhibition narrative that embraces ideas of experience and immersion. This research-informed PhD has helped to make visible the impact of these new curatorial approaches. A future publication and a conference would further disseminate the knowledge gained and extend the strategies available to curators to create their own meaningful and stimulating exhibitions environments.

With new design museums opening regularly across the globe, and existing museums redefining themselves, the design museum looks set to remain a key part of the future of design curating. Design museums make sense of and interpret a rapidly changing world and, in so doing, reinforce the distinctiveness of curating design. They also provide a validation for the necessary and expansive role of the design curator. As this PhD thesis has sought to show, curating design in the twenty-first century is challenging, complex, creative and ultimately collaborative.

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<sup>477</sup> Claire Catterall, ‘What’s in a name?’ *Blueprint* No. 243, June 2006: 130.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix i) Practitioner: Profile

**2015 - Present**      **Independent Design Curator, Writer and Educator**  
<https://donnalovedaycuration.com>

Course Leader: MA Curating Contemporary Design  
Kingston University in partnership with the Design Museum, London

Visiting Lecturer: MA Fashion Management and Communication  
University for the Creative Arts

External Examiner: MA Fashion Curation  
London College of Fashion

External Examiner: MA Curating and Collections  
Chelsea College of Arts, London (2017-18)

**2009 - 2015**      **Head of Curatorial**

Curator of high profile design and fashion exhibitions. Past exhibitions include:-

- *Cycle Revolution* (2015) - the final exhibition at the Design Museum's Shad Thames location before its move to Kensington in 2016. Winner of 'Best Cycling Event' at the London Cycling Awards 2016.
- *Women Fashion Power* (2014)
- *Hello, My Name is Paul Smith* (2013)
- *Christian Louboutin* (2012) - breaking all attendance records at the Design Museum. Winner of 'Best Exhibition Space' at the World Interiors News Awards 2013.
- *Hussein Chalayan - From fashion and back* (2009)
- *Matthew Williamson: 10 years in fashion* (2006)
- *Somewhere Totally Else: The European Design Show* (2006)
- *Formula One: The great design race* (2006) - winner of 'Best Temporary Exhibition' at the Design Week Awards 2006.
- *Saul Bass* (2004)
- *When Philip Met Isabella - Philip Treacy's hats for Isabella Blow* (2002)

Course leader for the Design Museum's MA Curating Contemporary Design, run in partnership with Kingston University.

**2001- 2015**      **Design Museum, London**

A progressive career at the Design Museum, commencing as a Senior Curator with skills and expertise recognised through promotions to Head of Exhibitions and Head of Curatorial.

**1999 - 2001                      British Film Institute, London**  
**Exhibitions Manager**

Conceived and curated a touring exhibition to showcase the collections of the Museum of the Moving Image.

**1997 - 1999                      Design Museum, London**  
**Curator**

Curated design exhibitions and collection displays including:-

- *Modern Britain 1929-1939* (1999)
- *Verner Panton: Light and Colour* (1999)
- *Ferdinand Porsche: Design Dynasty 1900-1998* (1998)

**1994 - 1997                      The Sculpture Company, London**  
**Administrative Director**

Established a commissioning agency for contemporary sculptors at The Royal Society of British Sculptors.

**1989 - 1994                      Barbican Art Gallery, London**  
**Exhibition Organiser**  
**Exhibition Assistant**

Curated fine art and photography exhibitions including:-

- *Eric Gill: Sculpture* (1992)
- *Impressionism in Britain* (1993)

**EDUCATION**

2011 - 2018   PhD by Practice at Kingston University  
Thesis: *Curating Design: Context, Culture and Reflective Practice, 1980 - 2018.*

1991 - 1993   Birkbeck College, University of London  
MA History of Art.

1985 - 1988   University of Reading  
BA Hons (2:1) History of Art and Architecture.

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

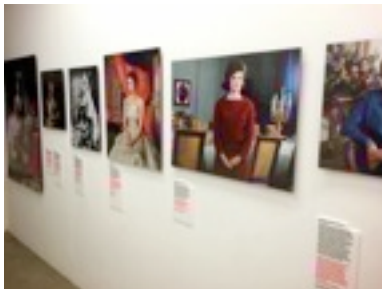
Fellow: Royal Society of Arts (RSA)  
Member: Museums Association (MA)  
Peer Assessor: Hull UK City of Culture (2017)  
Advisor: Arts&Heritage (2009 - 2013)  
Vice Chair and Committee member: Touring Exhibitions Group (TEG) (2003 - 2012).

## Appendix ii) Practitioner: Curated Exhibitions



### **Cycle Revolution**

the Design Museum: 18 November 2015 - 30 June 2016



### **Women Fashion Power**

the Design Museum: 29 October 2014 - 26 April 2015



### **Hello, My Name is Paul Smith**

the Design Museum: 15 November 2013 - 9 March 2014



### **Christian Louboutin**

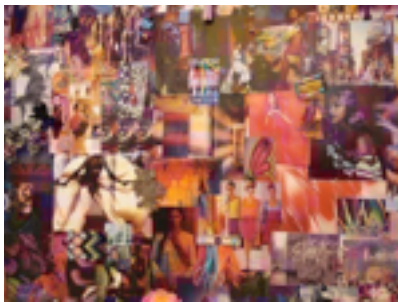
the Design Museum: 1 May - 9 July 2012



**Hussein Chalayan - From fashion and back**  
the Design Museum: 22 January - 17 May 2009



**Tim Walker: Pictures**  
the Design Museum: 9 May - 7 September 2008



**Matthew Williamson: 10 years in fashion**  
the Design Museum: 17 October 2007 - 17 January 2008

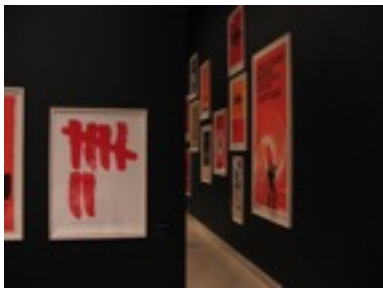


**Alan Fletcher - 50 years of graphic work (and play)**  
the Design Museum: 11 November 2006 - 18 February 2007



**Formula One - The great design race**

the Design Museum: 1 July - 29 October 2006



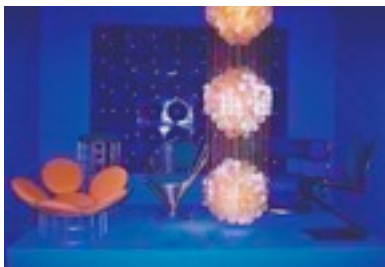
**Saul Bass**

the Design Museum: 17 July - 10 October 2004



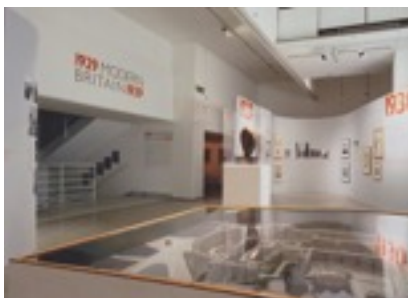
**When Philip Met Isabella: Phillip Treacy's hats for Isabella Blow**

the Design Museum: 5 July - 27 October 2002



**Verner Panton: Light and colour**

Design Museum: 17 June - 10 October 1999



**Modern Britain 1929-1939**

the Design Museum: 20 January - 6 June 1999



**Ferdinand Porsche: Design Dynasty 1900 - 1998**  
the Design Museum: 9 April - 31 August 1998



**Eric Gill: Sculpture**  
Barbican Art Gallery: 11 November 1992 - 7 February 1993

# PORTFOLIO OF WORK

## [Part Two of Two]

The Portfolio of Work forms a written, visual and oral record of the research-informed practice undertaken for the case study exhibition discussed in Chapter 4. The research material is presented as a series of PDF documents on a CD included alongside the thesis. Insert the CD and click on each icon which will open the following documents P1 - P10.

### **Stage 1: Curatorial Research**

- P1    Exhibition Schedule
- P2    Research Notes
- P3    Archive Notes

### **Stage 2: Concept Development and Narrative Structure**

- P4    Exhibition Concept Document: *The Visitor Journey*
- P5    Suggestions for Exhibition Title

### **Stage 3: Design Brief and Detailed Design Development**

- P6    Exhibition Design (Final version)
- P7    Press Release - Press Briefing Invitation

### **Stage 4: Content and Interpretation**

- P8    Exhibition Panel Text
- P9    Exhibition Film: *A Day in the Life of a Fashion Show* (MPEG file)

### **Stage 5: Production and Installation**

- P10   Images of the exhibition in its final form



- i) Entrance: Hello
- ii) Room 1: The First Shop  
“This was the size of my first shop.”
- iii) Room 2: The Bit in the Middle  
“I have been collecting prints and photographs since I was a teenager.”
- iv) Room 3: Paul’s Office  
“This is where I work in Covent Garden, London.”
- v) Room 4: Inside Paul’s Head  
“Ideas can come from anywhere - you can take inspiration from anything.”
- vi) Room 5: The Hotel Bedroom  
“This was my first showroom.”
- vii) Room 6: The Design Studio  
“This is where ideas are created.”
- viii) Room 6a: Promotion  
“I have been taking photographs since I was eleven, photography is one of my hobbies.”
- ix) Room 7: Collaborations  
“I find collaborations stimulating and challenging.”
- x) Room 8: The Shops  
“I hate shops that all look the same - I love individuality.”
- xi) Room 9: The Collections  
“This is my personal selection from the collections in the Paul Smith archive.”
- xii) Room 10: The Fashion Show  
“Now that you have seen where it all started and how we work, this is the final part of the process.”
- xiii) Exit: Goodbye  
“Every day is a new beginning.”